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STARBURST

MCU
CAPTAIN AMERICA
CIVIL WAR

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THE X-FILES
EMILY BOOTH
DOCTOR WHO
AGENT CARTER
THE JUNGLE BOOK
GAME OF THRONES

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MOVIES ★ TV ★ GAMING ★ AUDIO ★ COMICS ★ BOOKS

ISSUE
423

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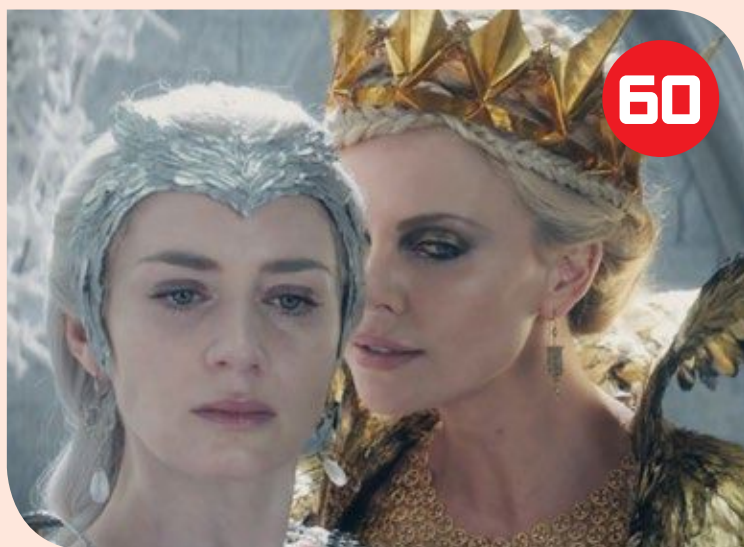
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Happy Easter from
horrorchannel
#BeAfraid



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EDITORIAL

Welcome to STARBURST Issue 423!

Ever since the post-credit sting of **Iron Man** established that this was indeed the beginning of the **MCU**, fans have been clamouring to see the comic book epic **Civil War** on the big screen. The saga was a pivotal moment in Marvel Comics, and a key moment in Captain America mythology, so it made perfect sense for this story line to be dealt with in a **Captain America** sequel. So, in yet another great example of **Marvel Studios** giving the fans exactly what they want, they are about to unleash the opus that is **Captain America: Civil War**.

Once the **MCU** got underway it was soon announced that **Captain America** was finally getting the big budget treatment. Having endured the TV movies starring Reb Brown, and the woefully under-budgeted effort by the 21st Century Film Corporation back in 1990, I was cautious about getting too excited. There was also the jingoistic element to consider. How would a character like Cap fit in with a world where the US is not seen too favourably in some corners of the globe? With all this baggage director Joe Johnston pulled off a miracle, and to this date **Captain America: First Avenger** is probably my favourite of all the Marvel Studio entries so far. It was a sentimental approach to a bygone era that was totally nailed. The Captain America character had been successfully transported across the mediums for the first time.

The only problem for me was that it ended with Cap frozen in ice, and awoken in modern day. Whereas **The Avengers** would not really have to address this *man out of time* aspect, any sequel would have to deal again with the relevance of this flag wearing throwback. **Captain America: The Winter Soldier** not only dealt with this dilemma, it knocked it out of the park.

It was genius on behalf of Marvel Studios to reinvent Cap as the main player in a spy thriller populated by super humans - Showing the Bond movies had it should be done. *That* scene in the lift alone was worth the ticket price. The way it tied into Marvel on TV and intersected with game changing events in **Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.** further cemented the **MCU** project as a whole in a way that **D.C.** can only dream of.

So can we expect a further reinvention of Cap with this latest instalment? I would think so. We are probably going to see Cap the freedom fighter. An insurgent in his own movie. I am really looking forward to see how it all plays out, and see if they go with the same tragic outcome as in the source material.

To get you ready for all this big screen excitement, we have stepped up to the plate. Within these very pages you will find everything you need. We look at recent events in the comic book **Captain America**, look back at the original **Civil War** mini-series, and much, much more. There is no better way to prepare to see your comic book heroes going toe to toe.

Also this issue we take a sneak peek at **Game of Thrones** Season Six, take you on a set visit for the upcoming horror movie **Await Further Instructions**, look at Disney's live action remake of **The Jungle Book**, chat to **Emily Booth** about indie horror **Cradle of Fear**, and geek out on a whole bunch of weird fairy tales.

Despite the overwhelming amount of gripping genre content we have still managed to fit in all your regular content, including the long running **TV Zone**, and **It's Only a Movie** (at the back of the mag as usual).

So choose your side, and get ready for **Civil War**...

Keep watching the weird and wonderful,



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STAR

READER, BEWARE, YOU'RE IN FOR A SCARE

STARBURST #421 was excellent! I am submitting my photo with this letter, so you can see who I am and how much I enjoy STARBURST! The DOCTOR WHO feature was a fun read! Al Ewing is a genius when it comes to his writing methods on DOCTOR WHO. His references are detailed and fun. A Look at GOOSEBUMPS - couldn't get enough of this article. I grew up on GOOSEBUMPS. With PRIDE, PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES, I love the way they took classical literature and threw in some zombies. I watched Eli Roth's GREEN INFERNO and the first cannibal scene was shocking

and horrifying, I bet the victim thought he was going to get a nice massage as he was placed on the altar. Boy, did they have a surprise for him! Eli Roth comes up with some horrific winners, who can forget HOSTEL? Great issue!

*Deanna Jaxine Stinson,
via EMAIL*



LETTER

CARRIE ON... WAITING

With both THE OMEN and CARRIE celebrating their 40th anniversaries this year, I just wondered whether the ever-wonderful STARBURST crew would be doing any features to celebrate these classics of horror? Sure, THE RAGE and the CARRIE remake were turd, but surely the series, not to mention that little bastard Damien, would make for some great retrospective features, plus it would tie in with the upcoming OMEN TV show.

Keep up the great work, guys!
Denzel, SLOUGH

We were planning to do a big feature on THE OMEN, but just not this year, we were thinking more like in issue... #666.

STRIKING A CHORD

Long-time reader, first time writing in. What prompted me to drop you a quick e-mail was I'd just picked up your BATMAN V SUPERMAN issue and absolutely loved the article from John Townsend on Takashi Miike's AUDITION. From the slow burn start, to the twisted conclusion that's a film that's stuck with me ever since I first saw it

a decade or so ago. In fact, your feature actually resulted in me ordering the new Blu-ray release of the film. It's yet to arrive, but I can't wait to get reacquainted with the chilling film in glorious HD! Thanks for reopening my eyes on this!

James Davies, via EMAIL

That's what we're here for!
Bringing joy and... erm terror
into the lives of our readers :)

BINDERS KEEPERS

Any chance of Dez Skinn writing a guest column? Also can we have STARBURST binders to keep our collections in mint condition?

John Lees, via EMAIL

There's no way of getting rid of Uncle Dez, and with the approaching year 2017 being STARBURST MAGAZINE's 40th anniversary, be assured that there will be an increased Dez Skinn presense in the magazine.

As for STARBURST binders, you are not the first to ask about these, they were very popular with readers in the past. If we get more of an interest we'll look into possibly making some. So, binderphiles make yourself known!

CURSE OF THE BEOWULF

WHAT!?!? No BEOWULF? I suppose that you will find more room to feature this acclaimed TV series soon? So far I have not missed an episode, and it is close to ending the first series (10 episodes), whether it will be back next year depends on the ratings.

Villmore Rochester, PECKHAM

We're glad you're enjoying BEOWULF, but it seems like you're in the minority, Villmore!

So at this rate, you may not get another trip to the Shieldlands, so enjoy it whilst it lasts!

We'd rather re-watch all of those STAR TREK: VOYAGER episodes where they go into that BEOWULF holodeck program! Voyager will never steer you wrong, and at least you know it has an ending!



CHEW-BAKERS DOZEN

I've broken my own record (LUCY: 11 times). I've seen STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS 12 times in the cinema by now and I have the tickets to prove it (I'll forward a scan if you like). Monday was STAR WARS day. Was ... 12 times REALLY is enough and yet: I still want to see it again! SW:TFA is definitely in my all-time fave movies top 5. I'm curious about the other readers!

*Yours sincerely,
 Darth KapReyles*

TWELVE!?!? Your local cinema will be getting a restraining order out on you if you aren't careful! Or perhaps you went on a tour of different cinemas far, far away each time?

P.S - Please don't send us the scans of the tickets.

[Shauna says:] P.P.S - Actually, please do, as I don't believe ANYONE would want to see STAR WARS twelve times!



"The wine had gone straight to his head."

Winner: IAN TYREMAN. Head over to www.starburstmagazine.com to enter this month's caption contest.

STARBURST

NEXT ISSUE: 424 ON SALE FROM APRIL 15TH

THINGS TO COME

A ROUND-UP OF THE
BEST (AND WORST)
OF THIS MONTH'S
MOVIE / TV NEWS



A CGI-enhanced remake of the 1977 Disney musical is just what we wanted, right? Anyone? OK, fair enough, we know what will win people over: a teaser poster that reminds people of **Where the Wilds Things Are**. That did well, didn't it? Hello? Oh, you've gone.

Still, with Bryce Dallas Howard, Robert Redford, Karl Urban on board, it's got to be good. Ahem. **Pete's Dragon** crashes into UK cinemas on August 12th.

MARVEL

One of the biggest successes of the year so far, in terms of both box office and fan response, is Tim Miller's **Deadpool**. As such, it comes as no surprise to know that a sequel is already in development over at 20th Century Fox. The first movie's writers, Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick, have begun work on a screenplay for **Deadpool 2**, although there's no word just yet on whether director Miller be back for this new movie. Star Ryan Reynolds has recently talked about how he'd happily play Wade Wilson for the rest of his life, so expect him to be back as the Merc with a Mouth. As for what other adventures could be in Deadpool's future, both Reese and Wernick have played down the chance of any full-on X-Men/Deadpool crossover effort any time soon. One of the main issues with such an idea, according to the pair, is that the current X-Men movie franchise is playing out in the 1980s, whereas Reynolds' Wilson is firmly in 2016. But one thing we *do* know about the future of Deadpool is that **Deadpool 2** will definitely feature Cable, the badass time-travelling mutant who is the son of Cyclops

and a Jean Grey clone. **Avatar**'s Stephen Lang has already thrown his name into the hat for that role, taking to his social media accounts to make it clear that he's actively campaigning for the Cable gig.

Interestingly enough, the success of **Deadpool** has played a part in how **Wolverine 3** may turn out. Early word on James Mangold's follow-up to **The Wolverine** is that its anticipated to be R-rated, meaning plenty of violence and language for Hugh Jackman's last outing as Weapon X. That film is starting production imminently, with a March 3rd, 2017 release scheduled for a film that looks likely to pull some inspiration from Mark Millar's fan favourite **Old Man Logan** comic book arc. Of course, this isn't the first time that Jackman's Logan has taken part in some extreme action, with an alternative unrated cut made of **The Wolverine** made available when the film was released on Blu-ray and DVD.

Briefly sticking with 20th Century Fox's Marvel properties, the bombing of Josh Trank's **Fantastic Four** was further confirmed when the film last month nabbed three Razzie Awards at the annual 'celebration' of Hollywood's most horrid pictures. Trank's FF went home with the awards for Worst Director, Worst Remake/Rip-Off/Sequel, and Worst Picture (which it actually shared with **Fifty Shades of Grey**).

Heading over to Disney's Marvel Cinematic Universe, after plenty of speculation, the legendary Kurt Russell has been confirmed to be a part of James Gunn's **Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2**. Previous reports suggested Russell and his iconic chin were being lined up to play Star-Lord's father, although his role in the film is being kept under wraps for now. As well as the returning team of Chris Pratt's Peter Quill, Zoe Saldana's Gamora, Dave Bautista's Drax, Bradley Cooper's Rocket Raccoon, and Vin Diesel's Groot, not to mention the returning Karen Gillan as Nebula, Russell is joined by fellow new additions in the shape of **Oldboy**'s Pom Klementieff, **Everest**'s Elizabeth Debicki, and **The Drop**'s Chris Sullivan. Production is currently underway on **Guardians 2**, which is set for a May 5th, 2017 release.

Elsewhere in the MCU, Adam McKay is returning for **Ant-Man and The Wasp**. McKay helped put the script together for Peyton Reed's **Ant-Man**, and he'll be back in some fashion to work with Andrew Barrer, Gabriel Ferrari, and Paul Rudd on the screenplay for the upcoming team-up that will see Rudd's Scott Lang/Ant-Man joined by Evangeline Lilly's Hope Van Dyne as she steps into the mantle of The Wasp – basically continuing what we saw at the end of last year's **Ant-Man**. **Ant-Man and The Wasp**, which will again be directed by Reed, is set for July 6th, 2018, although Rudd's Ant-Man will first be seen in Anthony and Joe Russo's **Captain America: Civil War** [see page 12] when that arrives in UK cinemas on April 29th.

Taking things down to the small screen realm, likely the biggest Marvel news of this past month is that the role of Iron Fist has finally been filled. **Game of Thrones** and **The Last Showing**'s Finn Jones has landed the Danny Rand gig. When it was announced that Marvel had put together an agreement with Netflix, the plan was to do four shows: **Daredevil**, **Jessica Jones**, **Luke Cage**, and **Iron Fist**. After that, the four titular heroes would come together for **The Defenders**. Now **Daredevil**'s second season has already arrived on Netflix, **Jessica Jones** has been confirmed for a second season, and Mike Colter's **Luke Cage** made a successful debut last year in **Jessica Jones** ahead of his own series. But all remained eerily quiet on the Danny Rand front until now. After rumours of Marvel and Netflix getting cold feet on going ahead with **Iron Fist**, those stories can now be put to bed, and there's even talk that Jones' Rand could well appear in **Luke Cage** when that arrives on Netflix towards the end of this year. As well as being a master martial artist, Danny Rand possesses the magical power of the Iron Fist. Oh, and he's also minted as a result of being the heir to the Rand

Corporation, and he uses his wealth to try and help some of NYC's poverty-stricken residents. In addition to this, he's also BFFs with Luke Cage, with the pair often teaming up. **Dexter's** Scott Buck will serve as showrunner on **Marvel's Iron Fist**, and the show is expected to land on Netflix next year.

FX's upcoming X-Men show **Legion** has added yet another name to its cast in the form of **The League's** Katie Aselton. The actress has signed on to play Amy, a character officially described as someone "who does her best to remain positive, which proves difficult when her brother has spent years in and out of hospitals after being diagnosed as schizophrenic." Amy's brother is David Haller, the show's lead character, the comic book son of Charles Xavier and who will be played by **The Guest's** Dan Stevens. David is the young man diagnosed as being schizophrenic, but who soon begins to realise that maybe the voices in his head aren't quite as imaginary as some would have him believe. In addition to Aselton and Stevens, the show will also feature Aubrey Plaza, Jean Smart, Jeremie Harris and Rachel Keller. **Fargo's** Noah Hawley is writing the pilot for the show and will serve as an executive producer alongside Lauren Shuler Donner, Bryan Singer, Simon Kinberg, Jeph Loeb, Jim Chory, and John Cameron.

And in some brief final Marvel news, **Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.** has recently been confirmed for a fourth season. The show has just returned from its mid-season break over in the US, whilst UK viewers are a few weeks behind their US counterparts. AP

STAR TREK

CBS has made the move to bring in Roddenberry Entertainment to assist with their new **Star Trek** series.

To be precise, the network has brought in Roddenberry Entertainment President Eugene 'Rod' Roddenberry and COO Trevor Roth. Rod is, of course, the son of the late great Gene Roddenberry, the creator of **Star Trek**. The pair will serve as executive producers alongside Bryan Fuller, Alex Kurtzman and Heather Kadin.

On this news, showrunner Fuller said, "Gene Roddenberry, the Great Bird of the Galaxy, left a finely feathered nest for all who love **Star Trek** to enjoy. And it is only fitting that Rod Roddenberry and Roddenberry Entertainment join our new Trek adventure to ensure that his father's legacy of hope for the future and infinite diversity in infinite combinations runs through our tales as Gene Roddenberry intended."

Rod himself added, "Moral dilemmas, human issues, complex characters and a genuine sense of optimism: these are the cornerstones of **Star Trek** and are what have made it such an influential and beloved franchise for the last 50 years. While I will always be humbled by its legacy and the legions of fans who are its guardians, it's a genuine honour to be joining a team of imaginative and incredibly capable individuals whose endeavour it is to uphold the tenets of **Star Trek's** legacy, while bringing it to audiences in a new era and on a contemporary platform."

Also on board is Nicholas Meyer, who directed the second and sixth **Trek** films **The Wrath of Khan** and **The Undiscovered Country**. He will be acting as writer and consulting producer for the show.

This new **Star Trek** series will launch with a special preview on CBS early next year. Following that, the premiere and all first-run episodes will initially be exclusive to the on-demand CBS All Access in the US. No details are known at this early stage as to where the series will find a home in the UK. AP

SUSPERIA

Dario Argento's classic 1977 nightmare has been long-mooted to be given the remake treatment, and now apparently things are taking shape. Italian director Luca Guadagnino has revealed the production will go ahead with Tilda Swinton (**Only Lovers Left Alive**) and Dakota Johnson (**Black Mass**) in the leads. Argento's iconic '77 effort ranks as one of the very best horrors of all-time amongst many fans and critics. A thrilling murder mystery affair, the plot centred on an American dancer arriving in Germany just as bodies pile up and witches emerge from the shadows. There's still nothing official on all of this just yet, but, as ever, expect more as it develops. AP



Men in Black director Barry Sonnenfeld's latest is a family comedy affair but with a very fantastical premise. Oscar-winner Kevin Spacey plays a grumpy businessman who wakes to find himself in the body of the family cat. Not in a dirty way, of course. Hilarity, we assume, will ensue. Robbie Amell (**The Flash**), **Alias'** Jennifer Garner, and the legendary Christopher Walken scrape the bottom of litter tray when **Nine Lives** hit cinemas on August 5th.

DC

Whilst all of the recent talk has been about **Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice**, this month brings word that an alternative cut of the film will be available when Zack Snyder's **Man of Steel** follow-up arrives on Blu-ray. Dubbed **Dawn of Justice Ultimate Edition**, this cut of the film will be R-rated due to 'sequences of violence'. Interestingly, Jena Malone's mystery character has been left on the cutting room floor as far as the theatrical cut of the film is concerned, but her secret role will feature in this R-rated cut. Many have predicted that the **Donnie Darko** actress could well be playing Barbara Gordon, aka Batgirl, aka Oracle, so could it be that said R-rated sequences of violence may center on the brutal Joker attack that confined the comic book Babs to a wheelchair? We'll have to wait and see when **Batman v Superman** gets its home release later this year.

Following **Dawn of Justice's** big screen bow will be David Ayer's **Suicide Squad**, scheduled for an August 5th release, and it looks as if plans are already underway for a **Suicide Squad** sequel. Both Ayer and Will Smith, **Suicide Squad's** Deadshot, are close to signing on for the Max Landis-penned **Bright**, a movie described as Ayer's **End of Watch**, but with orcs and fairies. The current word is that Ayer and Smith are trying to work the **Bright** schedule so that it frees up room for them to work together on a particular picture next year. That picture, in case you hadn't guessed it yet, is indeed **Suicide Squad 2**. No details are known at this stage, although obviously, you'd have to think that any sequel will be dependent on how **Suicide Squad** does when it arrives in the second half of this year.

Now despite us knowing that Zack Snyder's two-part **Justice League** adventure will feature Ben Affleck's Batman, Henry Cavill's Superman, Gal Gadot's Wonder Woman, Jason Momoa's Aquaman, Ezra Miller's Flash, and Ray Fisher's Cyborg, notable by his absence is Green Lantern. DC's Geoff Johns has gone on record to say that an Emerald Knight (or possibly two) will be appearing in **Justice League**, although new reports claim that we won't be seeing any Green Lanterns until at least June 2019's **Justice League Part Two**. First up, though, is **Justice League Part One**, which is set to start shooting this very April for a November 2017 release. Whether a Green Lantern appears in those movies or not, there'll be an abundance of them when **Green Lantern Corps** arrives in June 2020.

On the small screen, NBC's upcoming DC-based comedy **Powerless** has brought in its first cast members. The show will be headlined by **High School Musical**'s Vanessa Hudgens as Emily Locke, an insurance claims adjuster who has to deal with the frustrations of dealing with the destructive antics of superheroes and villains in her city. The show will primarily focus on an insurance company set in the DC world, and Hudgens will be joined by **Firefly**'s Alan Tudyk, **Community**'s Danny Pudi, and **A to Z**'s Christina Kirk. **Powerless** will debut later this year. AP

ALIEN: COVENANT

Ridley Scott's **Alien: Covenant** is starting to gather some traction as it's brought in more new names to the cast. **Empire**'s Jussie Smollett, **Upstream Color**'s Amy Seimetz, Selma's Carmen Ejogo, and *Machete Kills*' Callie Hernandez have all joined Scott's *Prometheus* sequel. No details are known just yet on what roles these names will be playing. Billy Crudup is in talks to join *Covenant*. Crudup is likely best known for **Almost Famous** ("I'm a golden god!") and for playing Dr Manhattan in *Watchmen*. Again, no details are known on what part is being lined up for Crudup. Already on board for the movie are Katherine Waterston, Demián Bichir, and Danny McBride, with Michael Fassbender returning as the android David.

The official synopsis reads: Set as the second chapter in a prequel trilogy that began with **Prometheus**, **Alien: Covenant** connects directly to Scott's 1979 seminal work of science fiction. It begins with the colony ship *Covenant*, bound for a remote planet on the far side of the galaxy. There, the crew discovers what they think is an uncharted paradise, but is actually a dark, dangerous world — whose sole inhabitant is the 'synthetic' David, survivor of the doomed *Prometheus* expedition.

Alien: Covenant has now been brought forward two months for an August 4th, 2017 release. AP

AND FINALLY...

When it was mentioned in those leaked files from Sony last year, people scoffed at the idea of a **Men in Black/23 Jump Street** crossover film. Well, it appears James Bobin (**The Muppets**) is now on board to direct. No official confirmation is forthcoming at the time of writing, but a June start date has been mooted. Bobin's latest film, **Alice Through the Looking Glass** opens in the UK on May 27th.

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Tye Sheridan (Cyclops/Scott Summers in **X-Men: Apocalypse**) has signed on to play the lead, Wade Watts, in Steven Spielberg's adaptation of **Ready Player One**. He joins Olivia Cooke (**Bates Motel**) and Ben Mendelsohn (**The Dark Knight Rises**) in the big screen version of Ernest Cline's bestseller, due to hit March 30th, 2018.

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Idris Elba and Matthew McConaughey have signed up to star in the big screen adaptation of Stephen King's **The Dark Tower**. Playing The Gunslinger and The Man in Black, respectively, shooting starts in May with a release date of January 13th, 2017.

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The Walt Disney Company has announced a small screen series for **Big Hero 6**, the warm-hearted and fun animated hit from last year. The show will follow directly on from the movie, with Hiro, Wasabi, Honey Lemon, Fred, Go Go, and, of course, Baymax all returning. It's expected to screen on Disney XD in 2017.

TTC 423 stories by Martin Unsworth, Andrew Pollard. Edited by Martin Unsworth

CBS ACTION

Fans of *Star Trek* will be pleased to hear that **STARBURST** will soon be having a new part of the magazine devoted to all things **Trek**. **The Saucer Section** will provide news, features, reviews, and interviews and will embrace every facet of *Starfleet*'s scope.

Until then, why not check out **CBS ACTION**, who regularly devote a large portion of their programming to the various incarnations of the series.

Currently screening are episodes from the **Original Series** and **Deep Space Nine**.

THE WONDER YEARS

Fondly-remembered cult TV series **The Wonder Years** is heading to DVD in a 26-disc set from Fabulous Films. Over the six seasons and 115 episodes the show followed the growing pains of young Kevin Arnold (Fred Savage) as he suffered the typical teenage angst in '60s America. The show was similar in tone to the Stephen King adaptation **Stand By Me**, and is fantastically nostalgic, with plenty of songs of the era setting the tone. The box set is released on April 4th. And no, that wasn't Marilyn Manson playing Kevin's friend Paul.

horrorchannel

A round-up of what not to miss this month on Horror Channel...

MARCH 25TH - BLACK DEATH (2010)

Director Christopher Smith's debut feature, **Creep** (2004) was a rather splendid horror flick set on the London Underground; for **Black Death**, he takes us to 14th century medieval England, with the plague rife and accusations of witchcraft common. A fabulous cast includes Sean Bean (does he make it to the end? We're not telling!), Oscar-winner Eddie Redmayne, **Repo Men**'s Carice van Houten, and the ever-reliable David Warner.

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MARCH 29TH - WEREWOLVES ON WHEELS (1971)

A riotous blend of exploitation horror and biker movie, in which a group of Hells Angels types come across a satanic cult in an old church. When the hoodlum's leaders are cursed with lycanthropy, their members begin to be found dead. If ever there was a film that 'did what it said on the tin', this is it.

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APRIL 1ST - DARKNESS FALLS (2003)

It may have been panned on its release, but Jonathan (Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles) Liebesman's first movie isn't all that bad. A vengeful supernatural killer, thought only to be a legend, returns to wreak havoc twelve years after it had murdered hero Kyle's mother. Chaney Kley is the said hero, and **Buffy**'s Emma Caulfield is the love interest. The fun premise of the 'Tooth Fairy' killer raises it a little above the standard stalk-and-slash chiller.

+++

APRIL 9TH - HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL (1999)

A remake of the superb 1959 William Castle film, this isn't half bad. There're enough jumps and scares to keep you satisfied and a solid, well-known cast including Geoffrey Rush, Famke Janssen, Ali Larter and Jeffrey Combs. Keep your eyes peeled for Peter Graves (from the original **Mission: Impossible** TV series) and **Buffy**'s James Marsters. Great makeup effects by Greg Nicotero and Dick Smith bolster the appeal.

+++

There are also plenty of great TV shows on offer during the month, including a chance to catch the superb **Hammer House of Horror** series from the beginning, and the George A. Romero-created **Tales from the Darkside** starts its third season.

Horror Channel is available on SKY 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138 and TalkTalk 487.

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BY FRED MCNAMARA

MARVEL'S CINEMATIC UNIVERSE HAS BEEN GOING FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH FOR YEARS, AND WE'RE NOW ABOUT TO SEE THE CULMINATION OF THE CLASH OF CHARACTERS THAT WAS PREVALENT IN AGE OF ULTRON PLAYED OUT AS A FULL-BLOWN CIVIL WAR...

Let's be honest – Marvel's cinematic adventures are practically nothing but fun and games. Almost each film bears a villain who forgoes any complexity, acting essentially as less of a character and more of a catalyst for making our favourite heroes all the more heroic. Plus, almost every film can be viewed as a self-contained story, for all the layer upon layer of intricate world-building, emphasising the dip-in-dip-out nature of movies today. However, *Captain America: Civil War*, the third in Cap's trilogy and the thirteenth entry in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, may just be the film that will change all this.

In terms of the build-up towards this earth-shattering entry in the MCU, Marvel appear to have learnt from their past mistakes. Some fans remain bitter over how the mild-flavoured *Avengers: Age of Ultron* revealed too much in its trailers, and while *Ant-Man's* comedy heist genre may have been a breath of fresh air for the MCU, but it ultimately stands as a forgettable chapter in the saga. *Civil War*, however, is going to give us new and exciting concepts to tuck into. But before we examine those concepts, can we not spare a thought for the unfortunate hero in all of this? In the rush of speculative debate, the tragic figure of Steve Rogers seems to have been completely forgotten about in certain circles thanks to the film's vast cast, the mystery of how *Civil War* will impact the MCU's future, and a certain Spidery gentleman.





Captain America: The First Avenger and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* may be quite separate in terms of tone, but they both excel in painting Steve as a doom-laden figure; one who appears to be constantly paying the ultimate price for being the definitive good guy. He refreshingly lacks the extreme masculine gusto of Thor, the narcissistic self-indulgence of Tony Stark and the... the... green of Bruce Banner. Guess you can't make a franchise out of every comic book hero!

But you certainly can with Steve. Before the MCU really took hold of its audience, superhero lovers had to make do with big-screen renditions of Spider-Man and Batman, two sides of the same coin. They were a pair of heroes who are intent on hiding their identities from the public; both plagued by personal traumas that led to their individualistic mission of vigilante justice. One's alter ego was a clumsy, awkward teen, the other's a business-minded billionaire. With Captain America, such complexities are lost. Captain America may be able to continue without Steve, but Steve is Captain America with or without the shield.

His natural good guy persona has us rooting for him before we're aware of the latest turmoil that requires him to don said shield. This, in turn, gives us a skewed vision of *Civil War*, more so than this year's secondary superhero epic, *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*. In DC's storm-gathering saga, we're clearly being presented with two very different ideologies about saving those in peril, giving audiences an equal opportunity to either support or rebuff both sides, right down to the film's very title.

Civil War, however, is a very different beast. It may have a *Towering Inferno*-esque appeal to it in its two star leads, but this is a Captain



America film, first and foremost. That, combined with our automatic assumption of Steve being the protagonist, we can't help but turn against Tony Stark, and gaze upon him as the enemy of the story. For close to ten years now, his arrogant persona, throwaway attitude to saving the day, and the fact that a good chunk of problems the world faces in the MCU is down to him, has been suggesting that one day, he'll get his comeuppance, and *Civil War* is just that. Think of the moment in the trailer where Bucky and Steve descend that small flight of stairs, joined at the hip, both slow and tense in their movement, as if they're ready for battle. Then where a wounded, breathless Tony cradles a seemingly lifeless Rhodey (James Rhodes/War Machine) on a barren battlefield. This pair of brief moments, both mere seconds long, carries more emotional weight than Tony's "So was I" line. It's the showing, not telling, after all.

Spinning off from this, *Civil War* illuminates a unique moment in the MCU canon. Unlike *Spider-Man 2* or *The Dark Knight*, the MCU is a drought when it comes to its usage of supervillains. Very often, the villains aren't treated as characters as all, but rather as plot devices used to emphasise the do-gooder nature of the heroes themselves. Of course, this is nothing new in superhero films, but *Civil War* is arguably taking this to extremes by dispensing with standard villains altogether. General Thaddeus E. 'Thunderbolt' Ross and Crossbones may be delivering some hefty punches to our heroes, and a common foe may eventually unite Cap and Iron Man in the film's climax, but if anything, *Civil War* appears to drive home the notion that when it comes to fully rounded characters, the MCU is far more invested in its heroes than its villains.

However, if this means we get to finally meet Black Panther and a brand new Spider-Man, who are we to complain? Set to prowl onto our screens in his own movie in 2018, writer John Robert Cole suggested in a recent interview that *Black Panther* would be an "historic opportunity to be a part of something important and special, particularly at a time when African Americans are affirming their indefinites while dealing with vilification and dehumanisation". Given that *Black Panther's* release coincides with *Infinity War's* début, could this be the great evolution the MCU needs? *Civil War* surely not only marks the beginning of the end for these initial Marvel heroes we've come to know and love, but also marks the tentative steps into new and exciting worlds, populated by strange doctors, spider men and marvellous captains. Could we finally see an end to the godforsaken origin story as we know it?

And then, of course, there's Spider-Man's re-introduction for moviegoers. The third bloody cinematic incarnation of the character in the space of fourteen years, and perhaps the ultimate test of the fan's faith in Marvel. In terms of what we know of the character and his contribution to the film's story, we obviously have the comic book source material, but beyond this, Marvel appear to have taken a page out of Disney's book when it comes to marketing the character. He's nowhere to be seen in the multitude of posters or trailers, and will certainly remain a closely guarded secret until the film's premiere. Let's hope this secrecy will be worth the speculation!

Despite all this, we want *Civil War* to be something more than the sum of its parts. We want it to be more than a fangasm-inducing introduction to new heroes, more than a semi-Avengers sequel, more than yet another MCU film with virtually zero substance in its villains and more than a prequel to *Infinity War*. We want it to be the definitive final chapter for Steve Rogers. We want this film to offer him stability outside of his isolated self, and his reunion with a partially cured Bucky is some proof of that.

Unfortunately, given the events of the last two films, perhaps we know, all too well, that whatever positives come into Cap's life, they will be short-lived. Whether it's his fleeting romance with Peggy Carter in *Captain America: The First Avenger*, or his decision to bring down the very organisation that brought him out of the ice in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, Steve Rogers' life has been one full of sacrifice. We, as an audience, would feel undeniably cheated if Steve comes out of *Civil War* no worse than he went in.





In both *The First Avenger* and *The Winter Soldier*, we've seen how far Steve is willing to go to defend the most basic of human rights. His attitude to being an Avenger, born out of living through one of the deadliest conflicts known to man, naturally clashes with Stark's. The military he desperately wanted to join initially refused to recognise him as a genuine soldier, whilst the organisation who defrosted him spun a web of deceit around him – Steve has a very real reason to reject the government control which Tony sees as perhaps little more than an antidote to the nightmares he suffered in previous films.



A key factor in the unfolding of the war itself is Bucky, the knife that tears Steve and Tony's friendship into shreds. But this element might be more than simply derivative of Steve's desire to defend the little man against the large, menacing government bodies. Will their rekindled friendship blind Steve in making the right decision when dealing with the Superhuman Registration Act thrust before him?



One could answer a confident 'yes', but it still stands that the various motives for both sides of the Avengers will be drawn from personal dilemmas they've encountered in previous chapters, hinting that *Captain America: Civil War* will greatly succeed as possibly the most character-driven chapter in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. As mentioned, a typically world-destroying foe may act as a temporary bridge-builder for Steve and Tony, but it's an inescapable fact that one of the most life-changing disasters our heroes must face is initially plagued by an internal collapse of the Avengers' bond and trust in each other.



In their finales, both Avengers films manage to sort everything out into a satisfactory, smiles-all-round conclusion, with everyone popping off home in time for tea. Even Natasha was barely given more than a few moments to grieve for losing Bruce before sizing up the new line-up. *Civil War* will easily take a page out of *The Winter Soldier*'s book in how our heroes dust themselves off. Everyone will drag themselves away, covered in wounds and scars. No-one will simply be popping home this time.

Long after *Civil War* has left us in a cloud of dust, there may be a select few who insist on pigeon-holing the film as Avengers 2.5, but we fans love to follow the breadcrumbs. The reunion of Bucky and Steve, the trailer's display of a *Winter Soldier*-esque montage of destruction, and the contract that has made Chris Evans our favourite Avenger soon running out of gas. As an event, *Civil War* will have ramifications for all involved, but as a story, this is very much Steve's hour.



Captain America: Civil War may struggle to encompass the bulk of its heroic cast in a satisfactory manner, but the emotional throttle that will drive the film is witnessing Steve forced into yet another corner, having to decide upon yet another life-shattering ultimatum, with all the usual world-thrown-into-crisis shenanigans.

A culmination of almost ten years' worth of diverse origin stories, galaxy-spinning quests, and genre-splitting heroes, the heartbreak *Captain America: Civil War* is bound to unleash will hang heavy over us. History teaches us that there are no winners in war, only losers. Given all the hints and clues we've received regarding where the MCU goes from here, we can readily summarise that no-one, not even Steve, will come out of this film in one piece. However, this makes *Civil War* a perfect coupling for Steve's character, in that the film will almost certainly match the tragic heroism of Steve Rogers, more so than *The First Avenger*'s quasi-Indiana Jones retro-ramp or *Winter Soldier*'s political pretensions.

Civil War might not be Steve's final hour, but everything we've seen so far suggests that it will indeed be his finest. Heart-wrenching drama, stiff upper lip sacrifice, and the self-destruction of the best superhero bromance to grace our screens – *Captain America: Civil War* might just bring an end to us describing Marvel's cinematic adventures as nothing more than fun and games.



CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR is waged in UK cinemas from April 29th and May 6th in the US.

NO MORE HEROES

by Callum Shepard

WITH THE BIG SCREEN ADAPTATION READY TO PUMMEL OUR SENSES, WE TAKE A LOOK BACK AT THE COMIC BOOK VERSION AND THE REPERCUSSIONS OF CIVIL WAR...

Superhero combat is one of those essential cornerstones of just about any comic. It's a turning point in a series; a special event in which differing characters cross paths, allowing fans to see two of their favourite supers throwing down against one another. From Batman clobbering Superman to the JLA fighting the Teen Titans or even Spider-Man tackling Daredevil, it's something intrinsically bound into the DNA of the superhero genre. Yet, for all the fun the Silver Age, Bronze Age and even the X-treme (!) early '90s had with this trope, many modern Marvel fans treat it with weariness. The very idea of it is regarded with cynical distaste and an edge of bitterness, and there's one very good reason for that: *Civil War*.

This was supposed to be the big one. The game changer. The crisis to eclipse all other disasters. Audiences were promised a story which would fully deliver upon that old, often subverted, tagline of 'Nothing will be the same ever

again!' and see something truly different. Heroes would turn upon one another over a situation to which there truly was no right answer, and villains would be forgotten in the face of their closest allies becoming their greatest foes. Marvel pulled out all the stops to try and promote *Civil War*, pushing issues like ringside seats to a boxing match and trying to enforce the hype that this was a comic with real political weight to its themes.

What award-winning author Mark Millar had planned was to see the Superhuman Registration Acts (SHRA) return with a vengeance after having been thwarted so many times before. Rather than being universally opposed, readers would see their heroes truly considering that it might be a necessary evil, and for Iron Man himself to lead the charge in its favour. At the same time, freedom-loving vigilantes led by Captain America would oppose it, even being forced to hide from the very powers they once fought to protect. Neutrals would be caught in the crossfire,

some would switch sides and ultimately fans would be left to decide who was right and who was wrong. At least that was the idea anyway. The unfortunate truth of the matter was that, for all its aspirations, *Civil War* ultimately prioritised spectacle over actually confronting the concepts it wished to explore.

Consider the inciting incident for this tale for one moment, the point this entire story used as the spark for its core events: The New Warriors' massacre. Treating their heroics as a reality TV show, the team tracked a group of powerful villains to a suburban town and fought to bring them to justice. However, as the fight drew to a close, the deranged and highly explosive villain Nitro refused to be taken quietly, demolishing the entire town beneath a vast mushroom cloud. What was once a thriving community was turned to ash, as panel after panel depicted wrecked homes, piles of corpses and even a playground of children vaporised in the detonation.





Somehow, rather than the fault falling squarely upon the shoulders of the New Warriors themselves, the global superhero community is blamed for this failure. With the public mysteriously forgetting this was merely from a group of outliers, and how their heroes had repeatedly saved the world from annihilation, the public quickly turned upon their defenders. At this, Iron Man abruptly declared that they 'needed to win back public trust' no matter the cost, and wholeheartedly supported the very laws he fought against so many times before. In the face of this, more than a few readers were left with two questions: How would carrying a superhero licence have ever prevented this? Better yet, as a villain caused this, why is it focusing only on the heroes? Neither was ever answered. In fact, the entire massacre was forgotten the moment Captain America and Iron Man started swinging punches. The deaths of hundreds of innocents were simply used to cause two heroes to violently attack one another, and then discarded the second Marvel

no longer required it to have any impact. While this would have been bad enough, the worst was yet to come - especially for Tony Stark.

Most long-time readers saw Stark's behaviour as being about as out of character as Batman strolling to a crime scene while wielding a Kalashnikov, but let's put this in perspective: the billionaire genius playboy philanthropist's core personality had been based upon a heavy anti-authoritarian sentiment. Having seen what the government would do with his technology as an arms dealer, his superhero career was built almost entirely upon keeping dangerous tech away from the government. Even one of his most famous stories, *The Armour Wars*, featured him desperately trying to keep his technology out of the wrong hands. Stark's very association with the Avengers saw him using everything at his disposal to keep them from becoming just another military asset for America; sacrificing his physical health, fortune and influence

just to keep his friends from becoming political pawns. Forgetting this, Millar was so adamant Stark remain leader of the Pro-Registration heroes that he was even willing to instantly overlook S.H.I.E.L.D. agents attempting to arrest Cap hours before the SHRA came into effect.

Naturally, with such a terrible start, things could only get worse once the story's title took on a double meaning throughout the Marvel offices. While Mark Millar's plan was to show neither side as being wholly right, new writers were soon brought in to help bolster and continue the story, dragging their political leanings in with them. Failing to treat this as an even-handed affair, writers of either side promptly demonised their opposing groups, until the SHRA's very rules were changing from issue to issue.

On the Pro-Registration side, registering itself was seen as a prerequisite to being a superhero crime fighter. Metahumans were given choice between refusing to





use their powers, being trained to safely use their powers, or going to prison. Even after completing training, there was no suggestion that any of them would be forced to serve as soldiers for S.H.I.E.L.D., and those staying were presented as doing so thanks to a sense of unity akin to that of the older Avengers.

Meanwhile, in the Anti-Registration comics, the SHRA was presented purely as forced conscription, arresting or killing any who resisted or even questioned the Act itself. Even those seeking to retire and no longer use their powers found themselves besieged by government hitmen the second the SHRA was passed, as Luke Cage soon found out. Going so far as to utterly ignore age groups, the likes of *Avengers: The Initiative* would depict S.H.I.E.L.D. forcibly conscripting children into its ranks and training them as a new generation of murderers no matter their abilities. Cloud 9 for example, a young girl whose only power was flight, was promptly conscripted and trained as a sniper under threat of a lifetime jail sentence.

As the Anti-Registration depiction slowly won out over time, 'Law vs Freedom' rapidly devolved into 'Fascists vs The Real Heroes' in nearly every comic. Along with tossing former comrades into a Negative Zone prison – that place best known for being one extra Beelzebub short of being Hell itself – almost entirely without trial, Stark dragged Reed Richards and Hank Pym into this mess. Naturally, with the former having single-handedly proven that an SHRA would have disastrous consequences a scant few years before and the latter being eternally tormented over having created Ultron, both were wholly behind Stark in creating homicidal robots to assist in their victory. Oh, but not just any homicidal robot, no. Not content with destroying decades of character development, the writers had the two forge a sociopathic clone of the then-presumed dead Thor, who promptly started murdering dissidents on sight.

While Clone Thor's (or Clor as he became nicknamed) rampage would be put down

to a supposed programming error, followed by him being retired. The Pro-Registration side would deploy the killer android multiple times afterwards. It would only be fully pensioned off in the face of mass desertions from Pro-Registration heroes, forcing Stark to bolster his numbers with a new source of metahumans: Supervillains. Dubbing them the Army of Thunderbolts, Stark mind-controlled or blackmailed most villains into his service, quickly assembling a legion of killers to hunt down Cap's band of resistance fighters. It was at about this point that many fans took to calling the armoured avenger Der Eisenführer, a name which would stick with him for years to come.

Of course, things were hardly peachy with Captain America's lot either. With writers forcing him to stick to strategies with little to zero chance of real success, Cap treated the conflict as if it were a literal war, only aggravating the situation. Holing up underground and gathering his forces, issue after issue depicted the





star-spangled man doing everything but attempt to reconcile with the other side. Going so far as to ignore Stark's offer of ceasefire in favour of an ambush, readers were treated to the sight of Cap hiding away, only occasionally emerging to sucker-punch Iron Man in the face. Even his allies were not entirely safe, as more than one comic alluded to loving mother and wife Susan Storm sleeping with Namor in order to attain help from Atlantis.

As you might have noticed, very little actual debate or talking took place in *Civil War*, which proved to be the comic's downfall. A key complaint of the series proved to be how Millar's themes and ideas were introduced but never really explored, with the writers simply falling back on what they knew: superhero fights. So, rather than resolving things with words and proving themselves right, arguments would be solved by who could punch their opponent hardest. This string of fights eventually culminated in the story abruptly teleporting the entirety of both sides to

New York City. Why there? So the story could have emergency workers tackle Captain America to the ground, see all the collateral damage he was causing, and surrender, declaring Iron Man right. Oh and then Cap was supposedly proven that he couldn't uphold American values because he didn't know what MySpace or NASCAR was, and then killed by a sniper.

If that sounds like a half-baked finale, it's really only because it was. *Civil War* wasn't so much the story where Captain America died so much as 'oh, and Captain America died'.

While a commercial success, critical and fan reviews alike were extremely polarised. Some appreciated its artwork, ideas, and fight scenes, while others were more critical of how the story ultimately failed to deliver upon its promise and character portrayals. The Marvel Universe would spend years recovering from the scars left by *Civil War*. It would take multiple retcons to redeem most of the Pro-Registration

heroes, and the literal erasure of the past five years from Stark's mind to finally fix the damage this series did to him. Even ten years on, the name carried such a stigma that, when *Captain America: Civil War* was announced, Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige had to publically reassure audiences that the film would *not* involve the SHRA in any way.

While Marvel itself is looking to take another stab at the story with *Civil War II*, fan reactions are cautious at best. Many are holding out hope that the Cinematic Universe will present a more even-handed conflict, sidestepping the key failings of the comic and the problematic depictions of so many heroes. Or, at the very least, when audiences are asked if they wish to side with Cap or Iron Man, they won't be so jaded as to once more respond "You're all fucked when the Hulk gets back!"

Marvel's *CIVIL WAR II* is set to commence in June.



CAP'S COMIC BOOK CATCH-UP

By Andrew Pollard



Join us as we recap (geddit?) over the past couple of years' worth of CAPTAIN AMERICA stories in the funny books...

Way back in **STARBURST** #398 and #399 (still just about available to order from starburstmagazine.com), as part of our *Captain America: Winter Soldier* preview, we did an extensive two-part look back at the comic book history of the Sentinel of Liberty. Now, with Cap's next big screen outing nearly upon us, it's time to see what's been happening with the Star-Spangled Avenger.

Our previous look at Cap's comic book times took us up to early 2014. Having died during *Civil War*, Steve Rogers had returned as Captain America once more (mainly down to having *not* actually died, instead being phased in and out of actual existence... as you do) and had played a heavy role in overseeing the battle between Earth's Mightiest Heroes and the X-Men during the *Avengers vs. X-Men* arc. Whilst the repercussions of this coming together of Marvel's most popular teams were far-reaching, including Cyclops ending up behind bars, it was a little line of dialogue that stuck with Rogers the most. With the Avengers having decided that the ever-powerful Phoenix Force was too much for just Rachel Summers to contain, the two teams took their battle to the blue side of the moon and had an almighty tear-up. But as things came to a head, Cyke declared that Cap could've done more to help out the X-Men and to understand their plight. Ever the sort to take this kind of thing to heart, Rogers was deeply troubled by this claim, largely because it was at least partly true, and so he put together what would be known as the Avengers Unity Squad. That group was made up of, you guessed it, members of both the Avengers and the X-Men.

AGE-OLD PROBLEMS

The first threat for Cap and his new team was, of course, the Red Skull, the long-time nemesis of the First Avenger. Always the bastard, Cap's greatest rogue this time dug up the corpse of Charles Xavier in order to channel the dead Professor X's telepathic abilities. Using this newfound skill, the Red Skull would essentially mind control the population of regular New Yorkers and turn them against any and all potential mutants. So twisted was Schmidt's plan, he even managed to manipulate heroes like Thor, Scarlet Witch and Rogue. Still, even though he is merely a man – albeit a super serum-powered man – Captain America's strong will stopped him from being fully controlled by the Red Skull. It was largely down to Cap's resistance, which distracted his foe long enough for the Scarlet Witch and Rogue to break free of Red Skull's shackles, enabling this new Avengers team to finally take down Johann Schmidt.

With his most famous rogue out of the way once more, even though he's likely to rise again at some point in the future, it was his next battle with Iron Nail that would be a true game-changer for Steve Rogers. Despite only debuting in *Captain America Vol 7 #12*, Iron Nail, or simply Ran Shen as he is known to his pals, made a huge mark in *Captain America Vol 7 #21*. In that fateful book, the conclusion saw Steve Rogers' Super-Soldier Serum nullified by the Iron Nail. After this rogue had stuck his tendrils into the torso of Rogers, the serum was essentially neutered and, as a result, Steve would rapidly become his actual real age. Yes, Steve Rogers was now very much a 90-year-old man.

Still, even though Rogers' body was incapable of partaking in the battles that the Sentinel of Liberty was so famous for, his mind was still as razor sharp as ever. And so, putting down the iconic shield, Rogers became a mission coordinator for the Avengers. In this role, Steve used his wisdom and decision-making to form plans of attack from a safe distance. But with Steve Rogers now out of physical action, the legendary shield and the mantle of Captain America went to another: enter Sam Wilson.

CAP GETS HIS WINGS

Marvel rejigged their comic book realm in 2014, and the three biggest changes were a female Thor, a change of attitude for Iron Man, and a new Captain America. Getting his own **All-New Captain America** title, Sam Wilson, the former Falcon and long-time Cap aide, became the new Sentinel of Liberty, complete with an impressive new Captain America outfit that also managed to keep Falcon's wings as part of the suit. Accompanied by Ian Zola's Nomad, Wilson's first task as Captain America was to tackle a familiar foe, Hydra. In fact, all didn't go so well for Sam in his first outing as the new Cap, for he would get ambushed by Hydra and had to rely on a conveniently timed rescue from Misty Knight. Teaming with Misty and Armadillo, Wilson would successfully defuse a whole host of explosives that Baron Zemo and Hydra had placed across the globe. Following this, though, Zemo then put another plan into motion. He was essentially looking to explode Baron Blood, himself full of poisonous, deadly blood, in order to cause mass chaos. However, Captain America would again save the day as he took down Blood and left him for S.H.I.E.L.D. to deal with.

After this, things took a politically driven turn for the character of Captain America. With plans for a Cosmic Cube due to be created by S.H.I.E.L.D. being leaked into the public domain by The Whisperer, Wilson decided to sever his working arrangement with S.H.I.E.L.D. This was a project that Sam had openly opposed before the leak, and so with its public reveal came a very public distancing from S.H.I.E.L.D. for Cap. In fact, when S.H.I.E.L.D. targeted





Whisperer, Sam Wilson would actually come to his assistance. The pair would then use their combined efforts to taken down various arms of Hydra. Even though Whisperer and the Captain were doing this for the greater good, these actions were still frowned upon in certain quarters, particularly when Captain America made another public declaration, this time revealing that he'd decided to stop working for the US government. Wilson's logic was that the United States and beyond needed a Captain America who wasn't as tied to 'the book' and who could be allowed to be more socially active. While some US citizens were fully behind Sam's decision, others, of course, took umbrage with this call and turned their backs on their Captain America.

RETURN TO ACTION

During this time, Steve Rogers found himself donning the legendary Captain America garb once more, however. When certain Avengers and X-Men were turned into villains and vice versa, all courtesy of a crazy spell from Doctor Doom and the Scarlet Witch, it was down to Rogers to make sure all returned back to normal. Not only did he oversee the actions of the Spider-Man-led Astonishing Avengers, but Rogers also found himself back in the saddle as he temporarily suited up to lend a hand and take down a rogue Falcon. Once those issues were all resolved, courtesy of a heroic take on the Red Skull known as the White Skull, Steve again took a backseat when it came to active combat. Well, for now at least. Because, yes, in case you hadn't seen it coming, Steve Rogers is soon to be returning full-time to the Captain America gig.

Later this year, just in time for *Civil War II*, Rogers will be returning to the role he made famous. In fact, Marvel will be running two separate books - *Captain America: Steve Rogers* and *Captain America: Sam Wilson* - at the same time, with it confirmed that Sam Wilson will *also* still be Captain America once Rogers returns to action. Both men will have to make a stand during this new *Civil War*, and it remains to be seen whether they'll both be on the same side or not when Marvel's vast array of heroes again suffer inner turmoil.

What we do know, however, is that the big screen incarnation of Captain America has plenty of questions and rumours surrounding his future. Speculation is plentiful that *Captain America: Civil War* could well conclude with Steve Rogers biting the bullet. In fact, there are even reports out there that three different endings have been shot for the film: one that sees Sam Wilson take over the shield from a fallen Rogers; one that sees Bucky Barnes take over from his bestest pal; and one that sees Agent 13 take on the Cap mantle after Steve's death. Of course, it could well be that Steve Rogers will make it through to the end credits absolutely fine, but the inclusion of Crossbones, himself the man seen responsible for Rogers' post-*Civil War* comic book death, would suggest that the cinematic *Civil War* won't end well for the First Avenger. Whilst many would love to see Bucky pick up the shield *if* Rogers doesn't make it out of *Civil War*, there's one school of thought that suggests that the MCU could follow recent comic book happenings and install Sam Wilson as their new Cap, and then there's the dark horse of Sharon Carter's Agent 13. Regardless, the cinematic *Civil War* promises to be a huge moment in the MCU, and here's hoping it can be just as action-packed as the comic book happenings of Steve Rogers and Sam Wilson have been over the last few years.



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CIVIL STORE

BY JACK
BOTTOMLEY

As **CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR** approaches, we take a look at the First Avenger's weirdest and most wonderful merchandise...

Surely when seeking out merchandise for the most proud and patriotic of all heroes, Captain America, you would think that the weirdness would be at an all time low. Surely a hero who admonished a fellow Avenger about bad language in *Age of Ultron* would not be the guy used to push any rude, odd, or barmy merch? Surely our 75-year-old (and looking good), genetically amplified, shield-lobbing patriot would have inspired only a helmet, a shield and some very red, white, and blue toys? Right? Well, yes, of course, they are popular Captain America items, but even the most straight-laced of superheroes is not safe from the realms of merchandising madness. So, as we all prepare for Steve Rogers to don the gear once more and fend off the familiar faces of evil - not to mention fellow Avenger Iron Man (going by what we have seen so far) - we look at a selection of the Cap's great, good and unusual ventures into the less-than-civil wars on store shelves...

Captain America Blue Navel Bar *(Marvel, 2015)*

There is a pun to be made here about the confusion between naval and navel, and while you would associate one with the shield-carrying super soldier, who would have thought the day would come when Captain America would also have a place in the world of body piercings? Officially licensed, this navel piercing allows you to carry your own shield around with you... a much smaller one, mind.



Captain America Jack in the Box *(Schylling, 2005)*

Some old school toys can really benefit from an upgrade and while Schylling's Captain America Jack in the Box may sound preposterous, the toy itself looks rather neat. Decorated with the comic book imagery of ol' Winghead, the box also plays the theme tune to the '60s animated TV series - a nostalgic pleasure if ever there was one!



Captain America Utility Belt *(Remco, 1979)*

The whole utility belt idea is often labelled as Batman's gig but that didn't stop Remco from releasing a Captain America utility belt (as well as belts for the likes of Wonder Woman, Spider-Man and, oddly, The Hulk). Truth be told, this 1979-released toy was not as remarkable as others, coming with a communicator, decoder glasses, handcuffs, a watch, a city decoder map, a secret identity card (kinda contradictory, is it not?) and... wait for it... a secret message. Colourfully put together and cool, we suppose you could summarise by saying, Cap's got a great package but it's not as big and impressive as Batman's (ahem).



Captain America Figure *(Mego, 1973)*

Over the years, there have been a great many figures, from the '75 Bend 'n Flex Captain America to Mattel's Secret Wars Captain America (1984) to the Marvel Legends Ultimate WWII Captain America (Hasbro, 2008). However, among the first were Mego, with their 8" doll figure first released in the fall of 1973. Though not entirely accurate (it was missing Cap's iconic red gloves), the doll was expensive to produce and Captain America became a very popular figure for Mego, with three slight variations (it's all in the stitching!) of the toy being released between 1973 and 1982. Mego also released a 12" version in 1979 (with 'Fly Action'... show-offs), which was a slimmer build, but with a huge head (not that we're judging). You can still find Mego's Captain America out there now, although the Mexican version of the figure, by Lili Ledy, and which came with gloves (well, red paper bag-looking hand covers), is far rarer - with around three mint condition boxed examples known to have survived.

Cap/Winter Soldier Badge

(Etsy, 2012)

We live in a world where issues don't always have to be resolved with fear, threat, prejudice, and hatred (unless you are Donald Trump); sometimes love can solve all. That being said, we doubt we'll be seeing The Winter Soldier (Bucky Barnes) and Captain America kissing one another passionately anytime soon, unless of course you grab yourself one of these badges. Designed by Barbicane at Etsy, the graphic novel-like design depicts Rogers (there's a joke somewhere, but we ain't going there) and Barnes smooching away their differences. We are not sure it is that type of relationship (Cap's type can be found kicking ass on Marvel's Agent Carter) but whatever the case, it is a better love story than Twilight or than Kanye and his on-going romance with his mirror...



Captain America Archery Set

(Larami Corp., 1974)

We wonder if a few people at Larami had had a late night when putting together this archery set toy. By our reckoning, 'The Man Out of Time' was never known as 'The Man Out of Arrows'. A blatant attempt at selling a standard archery set, this innocent toy is all well and good but Hawkeye is not going to be happy! "That's gimmick infringement cornball!"

Captain Americar (Mego, 1976)

A companion to their doll figures, this awesome vehicle toy from Mego deserves acknowledging for three reasons. 1) The brilliant action shot box art makes us want Cap to get behind a wheel - ASAP. 2) The toy itself was a lot of fun for '70s kids (with its - literal - deflector shield function), and 3) that glorious pun. Mego really hit a home run with this quite rare and collectable toy, which has gone for hundreds of dollars in many online auctions.



Captain America Diapers

(Ella Bella Bum, 2015)

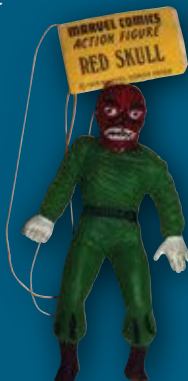
...Speaking of being full of it, one item that is far from being a load of old bab - so to speak - is this range of Captain America-inspired washable diapers from Ella Bella Bum. All poo jokes aside, these are the perfect addition to the pre-school patriot's wardrobe!



Red Skull Action Figure

(Marvel Comics Group, 1979)

When we look at merchandise, sometimes the bad guys don't get enough shelf space, and we can't imagine why the NAZI agent and megalomaniacal leader of HYDRA, Red Skull, doesn't get more love. Must be that excessive sun tan, eh? Anyway, when bad guys get their chance to shine in the world of merch, they need to make an impact. There is always the brave (and rare) Ben Cooper 1978 Red Skull Costume ("dress as a fascist, kids, it's fun") but impactful bad guy merch does not come any better than this evil-looking figure, which is arguably scarier than the real thing! His aggressive, scratchy features and heinous fashion sense truly make this Red Skull figure, from Marvel Comics Group, befitting of a character that recently threw a baby out of a window (Ultimate Avengers #5)... what a bastard.



Bootleg Figure (Mexico, 2008)

You've got to laugh, haven't you? This Mexican bootleg, which looks like a blue gimp with a dinner plate, is all levels of dodgy. There really is nothing that can be said about this one; no stars, no stripes, and no need for the painter to stay within the lines even! More crap than Cap!



Red Skull vs. Captain America Salt and Pepper Shakers (Westland Giftware, 2014)

You know you are bitter enemies when you can't even decide on a condiment without conflict. Salt and Pepper never looked so epic, as the Star-Spangled Avenger and the chrome-domed evildoer wage war for who gets to top off your food. Personally, we wouldn't trust Red Skull near our fish and chips but the choice is yours.



Captain America Bra (Etsy, 2015)

For the Lady Marvel in your life, this bra designed by UnpluggedStudio on Etsy, decorated with the comic strip images of Captain America, is pretty perfect. Neither overly sexualised nor raunchy, the man himself would approve of this well made geeky garment gift. Cue heroic thumbs up!



Marvel Super Heroes have a long-running history of enjoying long and epic adventures ever since the '60s. The shared nature of the Marvel Universe meant that the early books would keep making references to each other in the hope that kids would buy *all* the books Marvel made. These casual references ultimately grew into fully fledged crossover adventures that were monumental in both scale and size.

The *Contest of Champions* is broadly regarded as Marvel's first proper 'big event'. An Elder of the Universe calling himself the Grandmaster challenges Death to a game more complex and more exciting than chess. The prize was the resurrection of The Collector, a fellow Elder (played by Benicio del Toro in the MCU movie, *Guardians of The Galaxy*). The original story threw together some pretty unlikely heroes against each other, each of them representing a nation. A sort of Olympics, but with people with names like Shamrock and Sasquatch. Marvel has subsequently used the premise for various video games, and the story has inspired episodes of both Spider-Man and Fantastic Four cartoons. Marvel also gave us two sequels to this, all with roughly the same theme: heroes and villains scrapping it out due to the machinations of some cosmic being or other.

We can't really talk about big Marvel events without going into *Secret Wars*. Back in 1984, toy manufacturer Kenner was on a roll when it came to action figures, having produced both *Star Wars* and DC Heroes. Rivals Mattel contacted Marvel with the hope of producing a Marvel range of toys to take on Kenner. Thus, *Secret Wars* was born as a way to sell cool toys. The actual comic book event turned out to be pretty nifty. A cosmic being named The Beyonder forms a planet made out of parts of other worlds; filling this one sphere with cool aliens and weird technology. It then abducts Earth's greatest heroes and villains, forming them into teams and declaring "I am from beyond! Slay your enemies and all that you desire shall be yours! Nothing you dream of is impossible for me to accomplish!" Or to put it another way, if you want to get home, beat each other up for my amusement.

Because this was meant to promote a toy franchise, the books featured all the really popular characters: Thor, Captain America, The Thing, the Hulk, Doctor Doom, and so on. The range also had some odd playsets, including the Tower of Doom, which looked like the satanic blending of a castle and an oilrig.

The original *Secret Wars* had some great moments, and is also happens to be the beginning of the origin of Spider-Man villain Venom. The book proved so popular that Marvel tried again with *Secret Wars Two*, which featured a confused Beyonder coming to Earth and trying to fit in. Think Eddie Murphy's

MARVEL'S MAIN EVENTS

BY ED FORTUNE

CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR MAY BE A MAJOR MOVIE, BUT IT'S BASED ON ONE OF THE BIGGEST EVENTS IN MARVEL'S HISTORY: THE 2006 SUPERHERO MARATHON PRETTY MUCH CHANGED EVERYTHING IN THE MARVEL UNIVERSE. WE TAKE A LOOK AT SOME OTHER EPIC COMIC BOOK STORIES THAT MAY WELL END UP COMING TO A SILVER SCREEN NEAR YOU EVENTUALLY...

CONTEST OF CHAMPIONS



SECRET WARS



THE DIRE WRAITHS WAR



Coming to America, but with god-like powers and mass destruction.

Marvel would return to the idea years later. 2015's version of *Secret Wars* was very different. Using the original story as a template, the modern take has a race of beings called Beyonders, who are destroying the multiverse bit by bit. As the main Marvel Universe begins to end, Doctor Doom uses the power of the Beyonders to form one world in which to rescue as much life as he can. This process also makes him a god; he is Doctor Doom, after all. This version of the story has Battleworld made up of all sorts of 'alternate reality' Marvel worlds. So Marvel Zombies get to fight it out with Age of Ultron robot monsters, and a version of Magneto has his own 'House of M' style realm, in which the Master of Magnetism is literally king of the Mutants. It also served as a big excuse for Marvel to reboot its Universe, adding in elements from the movies and TV shows and streamlining decades of backstory. Given that Marvel seems to love this storyline, we may see it in the movies someday, possibly when all the current actors start getting too old to be convincing super-humans.

ANNIHILATION



The Dire Wraiths War deserves a special mention because it's unlikely we'll ever see it on the silver screen. Or even as a reprint. Published mostly in the pages of *Rom: Space Knight*, this epic story featured the titular Rom, a cybernetic warrior from a distant star sent to purge to Earth of shape-shifting alien witches. The story drew in all sorts of heroes, from Luke Cage to the X-Men, and had a really cool conspiracy/cold war vibe to the whole affair. Alas, Rom started out as a toy tie-in and Marvel has long since lost the license, which is a pity as it was one of Bill Mantlo's best stories.

SECRET INVASION



Another space adventure worth mentioning is *Annihilation*. The story deals with a massive galactic war, where alien insects from another dimension decide that it's time to take control of our reality. The main heroes include the likes of Drax the Destroyer and the Silver Surfer, as well as planet gobbling villain Galactus. *Annihilation* (and its follow up, *Annihilation: Conquest*) is the storyline that rebooted the version of the Guardians of The Galaxy that we know and love through the movies. Essentially a war story, a lot of the focus is on the lovable rogue known as Star-Lord, as well as Nova, the Human Rocket - we may yet see Nova in a movie of his own sometime. Much of *Annihilation* relies on Fantastic Four villains, so it's unlikely we'll see a direct translation in the movies anytime soon, largely due to Hollywood's repeated inability to put the FF on screen.

WORLD WAR HULK



Secret Invasion is another cool Marvel event that draws inspiration from Mister Fantastic and chums, and in many ways is the spiritual successor to *The Dire Wraiths War*. Nick Fury has disappeared, as he

ACTS OF VENGEANCE



suspects that something weird is going on with Earth's heroes. It turns out that he's 100% right. Recurring Fantastic Four foes, the shape-shifting alien monsters known as the Skrulls have infiltrated every level of human society, and using their advanced technology have also copied the powers of various heroes and infiltrated all the super teams. The humans work this out just in the nick of time and the whole thing results in a series of really tough battles and lots of paranoia.

World War Hulk, on the other hand, looks likely as a screen adaptation. This followed on from a very popular Hulk storyline called *Planet Hulk*. The premise was the usual Marvel madness: various heroes had conspired to send the Hulk off into space so he'd stop causing so much property damage. The Hulk finds himself on a Mad Max-style alien world, and ends up ruling it. Eventually, the Green Goliath comes back to Earth (with his own team of super-strong allies), and he's determined to take out his frustration on those who exiled him. In short, it's 'Hulk beats up the Marvel Universe', and who doesn't want to see that in the cinema?

DARK REIGN



Acts of Vengeance may also work, because it's all about Loki. Everybody's favourite Norse trickster busts a whole load of villains out of jail and suggests that rather than facing off against their usual foes, they seek out to destroy heroes that they may actually stand a chance of defeating. Because this is a plan from Loki, the whole plot is doomed to failure. It does feature some brilliant mismatches, so much so that Spider-Man gains cosmic powers during the entire series in order to keep him alive; at one point, Spidey faces off against Terrax, who can split planets in two!

SHADOWLAND



They have been plenty more events, too many to list here. Epic stories include the demonic invasion tale *Inferno*, which featured mostly X-Men, *Dark Reign*, which gave us an evil version of the Avengers, and *Shadowland*, a crime crossover that was Marvel's take on a gritty crime drama, which we may get to see on Netflix.

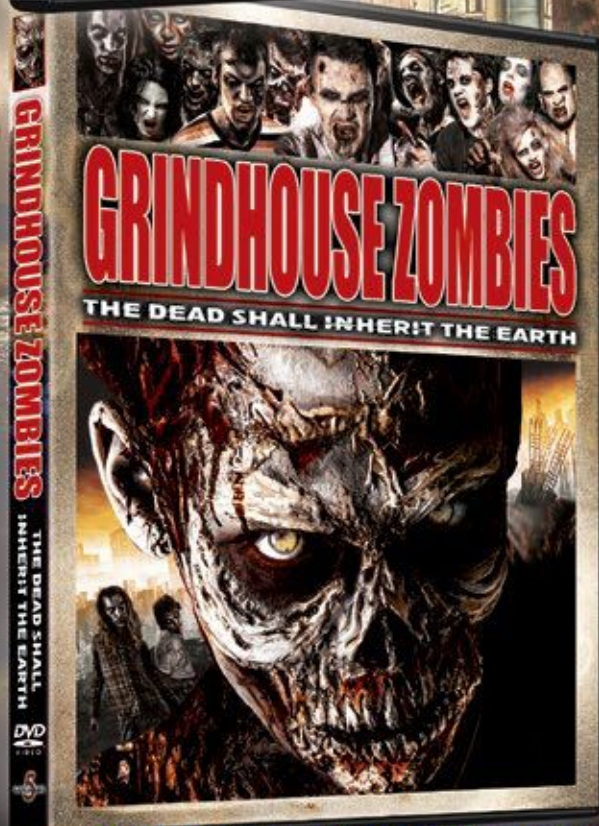
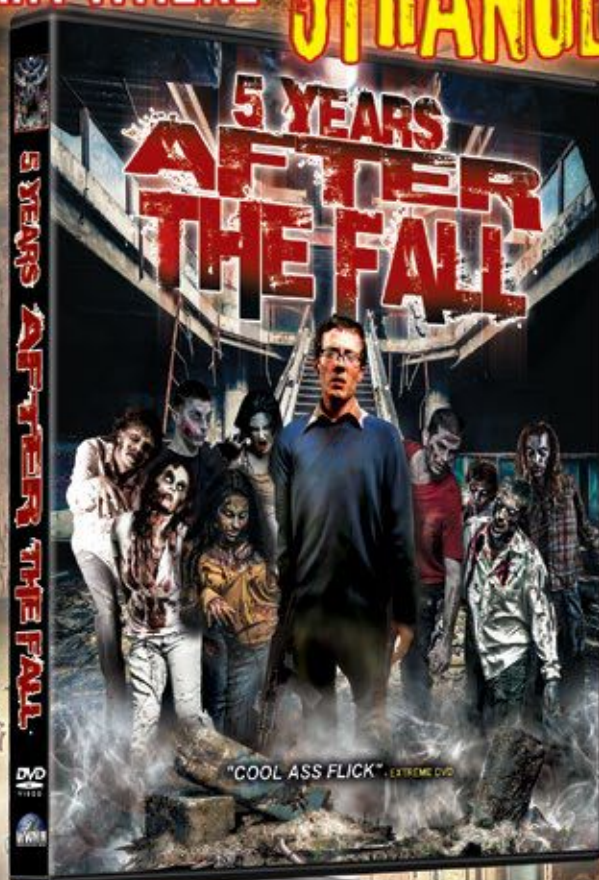
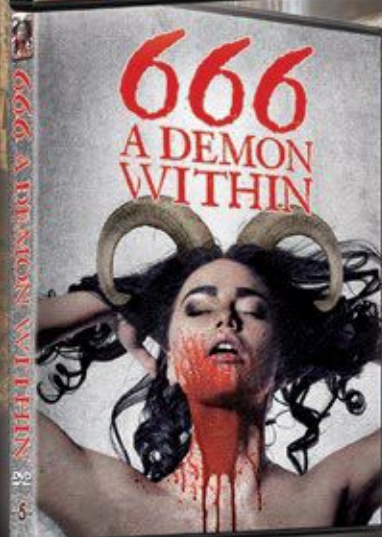
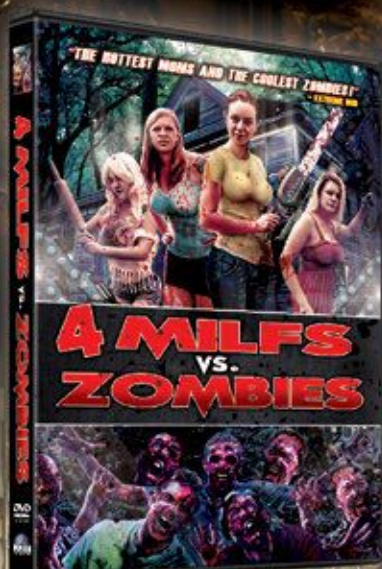
THE INFINITY WAR



One colossal story that we are expecting to see soon is *The Infinity War*. Long foreshadowed by the various magical gems that appear in the movies, *The Infinity War* sees Earth's heroes take on Thanos, a mad alien Titan who courts the personification of Death itself. And when we say courts, we mean that Thanos is trying to woo Death; we can only assume he made a match on Tinder. The comics focus on a character called Adam Warlock, who is an intergalactic messiah of sorts. Time will tell how closely the movies follow the books, but we're hoping that the movie will embrace the biggest and weirdest ideas from the mighty world of Marvel to create something really different and inspiring. We will all have to wait and see.



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THE
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BY MATT WELLS

We can't think of CAPTAIN AMERICA without remembering his lost love, particularly as her hit series *AGENT CARTER* has just completed a second season run in the US. Let's get up to date with the exploits of the dynamic British spy...

One of the most important characters in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Agent Peggy Carter first made her explosive debut in *Captain America: The First Avenger*. Wearing velvet-red lipstick and reminiscent of a classic WWII military pin-up, Hayley Atwell's performance as the titular spy was both captivating and unique.

During WWII, Agent Carter was assigned to aid Steve Rogers through the ambitious 'Super-Soldier' experiment, Project Rebirth. During Rogers' training to become Captain America, Peggy found that she was falling in love with the Star Spangled Man. Unfortunately, before they could even share a dance together, Captain America was presumed dead after saving New York from the Red Skull.

Peggy Carter continued her work with the armed forces, and soon became an essential component of the Marvel universe. Her role in *The First Avenger* demanded expansion, and she was later featured in the *Iron Man 3* DVD's one-shot, named *Agent Carter*.

Dealing with the blatant sexism of the time, Peggy was relegated to simple code-breaking for the Strategic Scientific Reserve. A secret agency formed after WWII, Carter ended up locating the Zodiac, a deadly toxin that the SSR were currently investigating. Proving her worth to Agent Flynn, she was reprimanded for her actions before being called to help form S.H.I.E.L.D.

The 15-minute short demonstrated Peggy's extraordinary abilities, as she ass-kicked her way through the mission. She was a force to be reckoned with, and the one-shot proved that there was a huge demand for more Agent Carter. Due to this increased interest, ABC eventually confirmed their deal with Marvel to produce an 8-episode series. Focusing on her life after WWII, the new series was set to take place in New York's SSR department.



ABC employed a well-rounded selection of actors for *Agent Carter*, each renowned for their previous work in television. Shea Whigham (*Boardwalk Empire*) was cast as Carter's respectable Chief, Roger Dooley, and Chad Michael Murray (*The O.C.*) starred as Jack Thompson, a chauvinistic war veteran with an attitude. Whilst Dooley may have respected Carter and offered her the new opportunity, Thompson considered her to be an unnecessary obstacle.

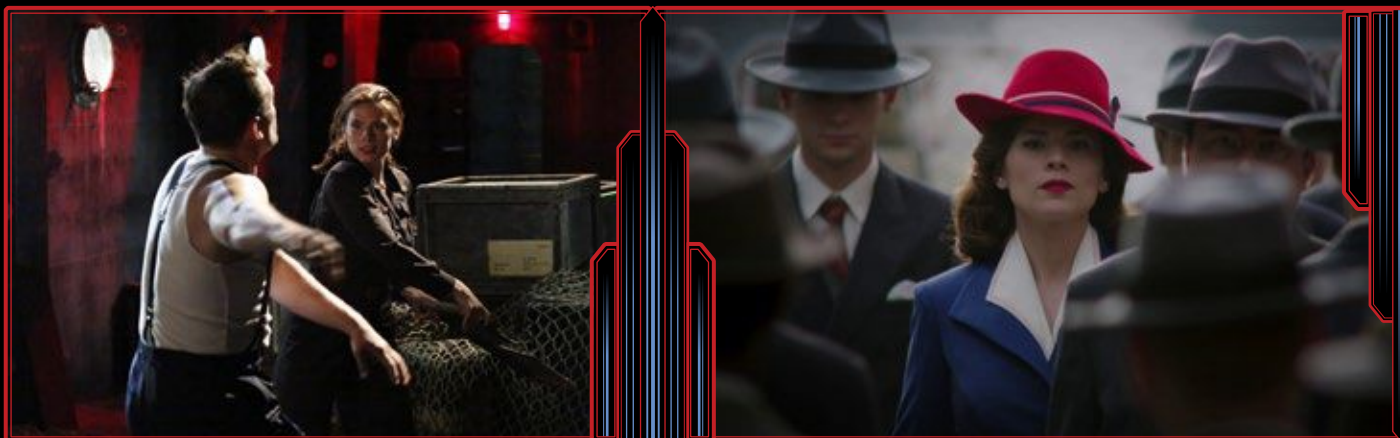
Unsurprisingly, Carter was relegated to a simple desk job by her new peers. The same woman who had once fought alongside Captain America was now reduced to answering phone calls in a completely male-dominated workplace.

Despite not having any romantic subplots in the first season, another agent named Daniel Sousa, played by Enver Gjokaj, takes an interest in Carter. Crippled in the war, but a dedicated agent, Sousa sees a kinship with Carter, whose handicap often means other agents look down on him. Chivalrous as he may be, Sousa does realise that he may not be able to match up to Peggy's previous flame, Captain America.

The first season had a decent premise, focusing on the entrepreneur Howard Stark living life as a fugitive. Reprising his role as Stark yet again, Dominic Cooper brilliantly portrays the older playboy philanthropist. Accused of selling weapons to enemies of the United States, Stark secretly hires Agent Carter to clear his name, with the help of his wonderful butler, Edwin Jarvis.

Played by the great James D'Arcy (*Cloud Atlas*, *Broadchurch*), Jarvis is one of the many highlights of the show. Ostensibly British, Jarvis is a respectable gentleman, who provides the main comic relief in the series. Acting as Carter's confidant and unnecessary bodyguard, he soon becomes an integral part of the story.

Of course, Edwin Jarvis is the basis for Tony Stark's superior AI technology, aptly named J.A.R.V.I.S. An extremely impressive AI, Tony borrowed the traits of Edwin: kind, responsive, and perceptive. Although the relationship between a young Tony Stark and Jarvis is yet to be explored in the show, it's a touching fact that Tony attempted to replicate the strong bond he once had with his butler.





There's a great dynamic between Carter and Jarvis, which might be partly due to their British heritage. While Carter is the more serious type, Jarvis tends to see the world in a different light. There's a strong platonic relationship between the two, and although Jarvis mentions his loving wife often, she isn't revealed until the second season. Surprisingly, she's quite the polar opposite to Edwin.

Throughout the series, Carter battles with Chief Dooley and Jack Thompson, as her own investigation encroaches upon their case. Almost always one step ahead of them, Carter soon discovers that an evil Soviet organisation called Leviathan are stealing and attempting to arm Stark's nefarious gadgets, and their main focus is Nitramene, a deadly potent explosive.

This revelation paved the way for a shocking reveal, in the form of Dottie Underwood. On the surface, Dottie is Peggy's well-spoken and polite neighbour. Under that pleasant demeanour, though, lies one of the deadliest assassins of the time. Played by Bridget Regan, Dottie is undeniably one of the

best characters of the show.

She's also one of Carter's most formidable foes, and almost her equal in every way. It's a pleasant relief to see that *Agent Carter* can boast both a strong female protagonist and antagonist, and obviously, their feud has spawned countless fan-fiction, which has even been addressed by Hayley Atwell on numerous occasions.

Even though Carter was protecting Stark from the authorities, he's not completely honest about the identification of a stolen EMP weapon. Named 'The Blitzkrieg Button', Carter's suspicions lead her to believe it's something else entirely. Unfortunately for her, it turns out to be one of the most dangerous possessions in the world: a vial of Captain America's blood.

Saddened by Stark's dishonesty, Carter reconsiders her position in helping him. The formula for the Super Soldier serum disappeared with the assassination of Abraham Erskine, the scientist, and if the vial were to fall into the wrong hands, it could produce an army of super soldiers. Of course, further experiments to recreate the

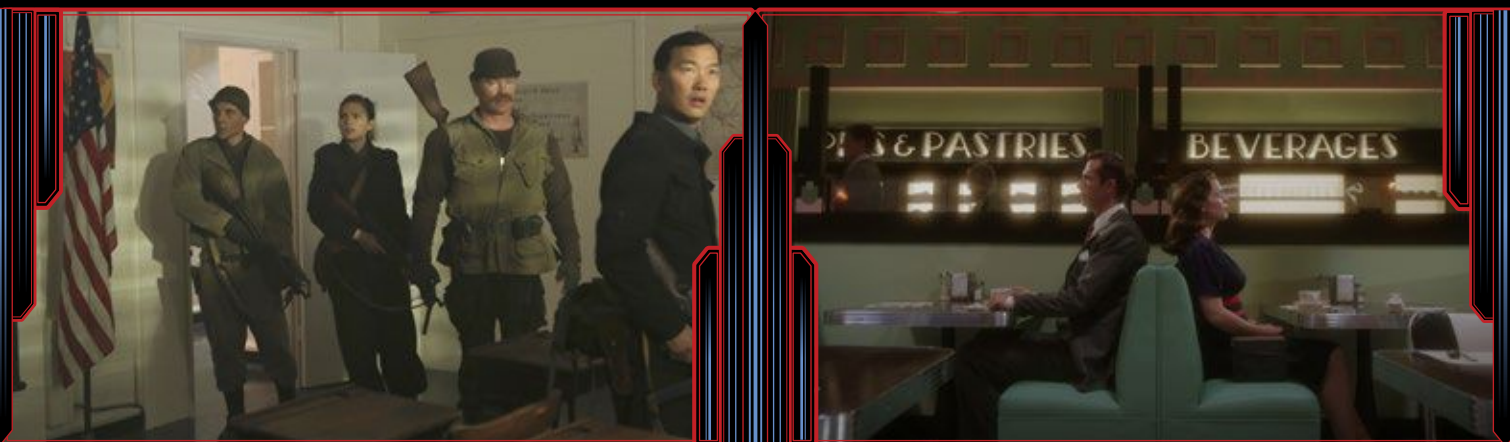
formula resulted in one of the Avengers's key members, The Hulk.

Perhaps the best episode in the series, *The Iron Ceiling* further explored the origins of some of the MCU's main characters, such as the Black Widow. Featuring the Soviet training facility named The Red Room Academy, the episode opened with a harrowing scene featuring a young Dottie Underwood murdering her opponent. Under the tutelage of their strenuous instructor, young girls were trained to become some of the world's most elite assassins.

In *The Iron Ceiling*, the show transcended onto another level, with its gruelling intro, Dum Dum Dugan's magnificent moustache, and the brave rescue of imprisoned scientist Dr Ivchenko, played by Ralph Brown (yes, Danny the Drug Dealer from *Withnail and I*). Ending with Sousa discovering Carter's independent investigation, *Agent Carter* did more favours in exploring Black Widow's background than *Age of Ultron* could have ever hoped for.

Agent Carter certainly didn't pull its punches either, allowing for the death of one





of its main characters. Dr Ivchenko, revealing himself to be Johann Fennhoff, a member of Leviathan, ends up hypnotising Chief Dooley into wearing one of Stark's explosive vests. Breaking the spell just in time, Dooley sacrifices himself to save his trusted agents.

The penultimate episode raised the stakes with Dooley's unfortunate demise, but Fennhoff wasn't finished there. After obtaining Howard Stark's deadly creation, the gaseous substance known as Midnight Oil was unleashed on unsuspecting cinemagoers.

The result ended with a brutal massacre, as the SSR discovered Fennhoff's revenge plot to release the gas on all of New York. Having seen the psychosis caused by Midnight Oil on his deceased brother, Fennhoff, with the aid of Dottie Underwood, successfully manages to abduct Howard Stark.

Of course, Agent Carter saves the day and foils Fennhoff's plan. Defeating Dottie in combat and convincing a hypnotised Stark not to drop Midnight Oil on the city, Fennhoff is captured by the SSR and placed into a prison cell with the scheming Arnim Zola.

Having a hypnotist imprisoned with one of HYDRA's deadliest minds probably wasn't the best idea, and the results of their inevitable teamwork can be witnessed in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, where it's revealed that HYDRA successfully managed to infiltrate S.H.I.E.L.D. and create chaos around the world.

Using his new resources, Zola was then able to experiment on Bucky Barnes. Long thought dead, Captain America's old ally was turned into HYDRA's secret weapon. Presumably, HYDRA was also responsible for Howard Stark's unfortunate car crash, which resulted in his death.

The last scene of Season One ends on a sombre note. After everything's been wrapped up, Peggy comes to the conclusion that she must throw the vial of blood into the river. After the turbulent time spent in WWII and with the SSR, she finally has closure.

Thankfully, Season One was a hit with critics and fans. Praised for its use of female characters and a tight script, there was demand for another season. It was arguably Marvel's finest network show to date, and fans got their wish when the show was commissioned for another series.

Currently airing, the second series

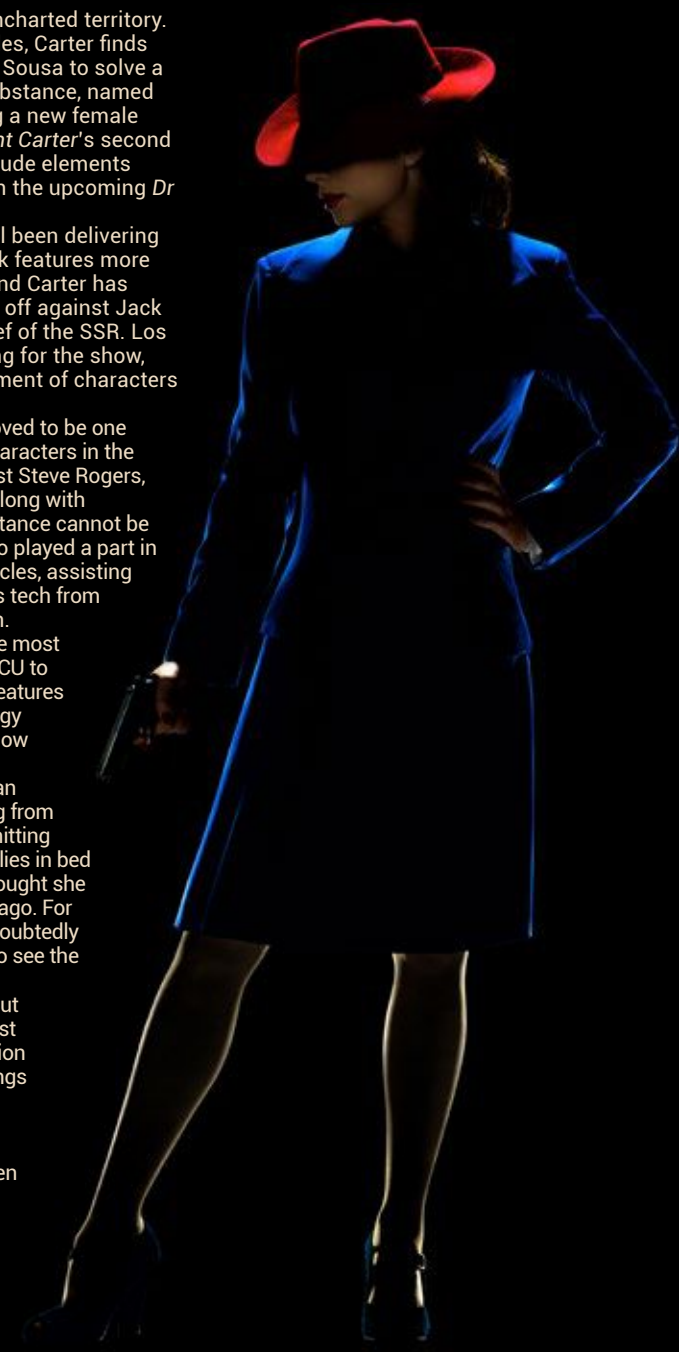
takes Agent Carter to uncharted territory. Now in sunny Los Angeles, Carter finds herself teaming up with Sousa to solve a case involving a new substance, named Zero Matter. Introducing a new female villain into the mix, *Agent Carter's* second season promises to include elements that will be referenced in the upcoming *Dr Strange* movie.

This season has still been delivering the goods. Howard Stark features more prominently this time, and Carter has been tasked with facing off against Jack Thompson, the new chief of the SSR. Los Angeles is a great setting for the show, and the further development of characters has been superb.

Peggy Carter has proved to be one of the most important characters in the MCU, as she helped assist Steve Rogers, and formed S.H.I.E.L.D. along with Howard Stark. Her importance cannot be understated, and she also played a part in the creation of Pym Particles, assisting Hank Pym in securing his tech from HYDRA militants in Berlin.

In what is perhaps the most emotional scene in the MCU to date, *The Winter Soldier* features Steve Rogers visiting Peggy at her retirement home. Now in her nineties, Peggy has long since left her life as an agent but is now suffering from Alzheimer's. In the hard-hitting scene, an emotive Peggy lies in bed talking to the man she thought she had lost almost 70 years ago. For fans of the show, it is undoubtedly touching and rewarding to see the two meet after so long.

Agent Carter is, without a doubt, Marvel's strongest outing on network television to date. Hayley Atwell brings to the show a convincing lead female, and it's a pleasant relief to see a programme feature women so predominately. She may not tie into *Civil War*, but her influence will be evident throughout. Here's to the next season or two of *Agent Carter*!



OUTSIDE THE BOX

ALL THE NEWS
FROM THE WORLDS
OF DOCTOR WHO
WITH KIERON MOORE



time of going to print – but with no new **Who** being filmed until May, we're hopeful there'll be more at some point.

DOCTOR WHO Comics Day 2016 Announced

After successful events in 2014 and 2015, Titan Comics have announced their third global **Doctor Who** Comics Day, to take place on Saturday, 9th July. It's set to be the biggest one yet, with signings and events in multiple countries. Last year's event tied in with **Four Doctors**, Paul Cornell and Neil Edwards' multi-Doctor event series, and so we're hoping Titan have something similarly exciting planned. For more information, or to sign up your store or library to host an event, visit titan-comics.com.

DOCTOR WHO Limited Edition Steelbooks Released

Doctor Who: The Complete Ninth Series has recently been released on DVD and Blu-ray (see our review on page 40), but hardened collectors will want to snap up the steelbook exclusive to Amazon, featuring beautiful cover artwork by Alice X Zhang, available for £39.99. Fans of the classic series, meanwhile, are in for a similar treat – the Third Doctor's debut story **Spearhead from Space** is getting a steelbook Blu-ray release on March 28th, exclusively from Zavvi.com and priced at £15.99. **Spearhead**, in which Jon Pertwee's Doctor first fights the Autons, was the only classic story to be shot entirely on film, and so looks great restored to HD.



No More Me

At the end of Series Nine, Clara Oswald flew off into Time And Space in a stolen TARDIS alongside Me. Sadly, I don't mean me, as in this humble STARBURST columnist, but the character also known as Ashildr, played by **Game of Thrones'** Maisie Williams. Williams has recently confirmed that her character won't be returning: *"I'm not going to be working on Doctor Who again. Everyone's hyping about it, which is very exciting, but I guess that's more of a publicity thing. But no, I'm not going to return, I have a lot of other really exciting projects lined up instead."* Those future projects include techno-superhero film **iBoy**, zombie flick **The Forests of Hands and Teeth**, and the upcoming sixth season of **Thrones**. Of course, if Me's not returning, it seems unlikely that Jenna Coleman's Clara will either – and so her sixth exit from the show might actually be her final one!

Series Nine Materialises in DOCTOR WHO Experience

The **Doctor Who** Experience in Cardiff has had a bit of a regeneration – not a full one, more like a metacrisis – with sets, props, and costumes from 2015's Series Nine now on display to the public. You can visit Davros' hospital room (complete with the only chair on Skaro), take a look at the Doctor's new sonic screwdriver, come face to face with the creepy Veil, and admire costumes worn by River Song and Me [*let's not do that joke again* – Ed]. The tours of the actual TARDIS set, however, are closed at the

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WATCHING DOCTOR WHO

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK
AT THE WHONIVERSE
BY JR SOUTHALL



Last year, Steven Moffat told us that he'd been talking to the BBC about the future of *Doctor Who* – and revealed that according to their 'business plan' it had, at least, another five years on TV, more or less guaranteed. Those of us who've enjoyed the last five years or so hoped this meant another five with Moffat at the helm, while those who haven't shook their heads and wondered what was worse, losing *Doctor Who* or facing another half-decade under the same writer. What has now become apparent is that it wasn't Steven Moffat's name the BBC had on their plan, but Chris Chibnall's (and after all, Moffat never said it was him the BBC were expecting to take it to 2020). And an awful lot of things fall into place.

It seems ITV's commission of a third series of *Broadchurch* is more than likely responsible for Steven Moffat staying on and completing one more series of *Doctor Who* than he'd originally intended – and for that series to be delayed until 2017 as well. Because if Chibnall had been expected to

assume the *Doctor Who* showrunnership as early as the next series, then ITV had thrown a spanner in that intention. It's not hard to imagine that the BBC's five-year plan must have been drawn up after Chibnall's unavailability had become apparent, because it seems to make sense that an initial run of three series beginning in the spring of 2018 would run to the summer of 2020. And with luck, if a return to Easter starts has the desired effect, the three series it looks like Chibnall might be contracted for will be extended into the next decade after this.

While it is sad to see Moffat go (albeit a sadness tempered by that extra series from him that we would never otherwise have had; a series that, because it was superfluous to the writer's original plan, might end up being his most interesting yet), as always there is a sense of anticipation around the succession between showrunners that for those of us who follow these things this closely, matches the excitement around the

changeover of Doctors. It happens rather less frequently these days, too.

Chris Chibnall was – insofar as people who actually work within the industry are concerned – the obvious choice as Moffat's replacement, even if he didn't figure very highly on a lot of fans' wish lists (a lot of the kind of fans who advertise their wish lists in public, that is). The BAFTA award-winning producer and lead writer on ITV's runaway success of 2013, *Broadchurch* (the second series of which, regarded as underperforming by a lot of the people who probably regard Chibnall as a second-best choice, actually improved upon the already astounding viewing figures of the first), had already proved himself to the BBC with productions such as *United* and *The Great Train Robbery*. Lest we forget (amid our fury at the production design of the *Cyberwoman*) he also took *Torchwood* from its BBC Three beginnings to a slot on BBC Two and left it with the door open at BBC One, all the while making of it a Transatlantic success that would ultimately clear the

way for *Doctor Who* in America. Nobody else in the frame had credentials that came anywhere close to Chibnall's.

Those fans hoping for a succession from somewhere outside the usual frame might do well to remember that anyone with the talent to supervise *Doctor Who* (and a thick enough skin) would almost certainly have already written for it, and with there being six years between Chibnall's last broadcast story and his next, he's as close to an 'outsider' as the BBC could realistically consider.

Sadly, of course, there are still a substantial number of people who are judging his *Doctor Who* output long before it even enters production, let alone reaches our screens, based on entirely subjective notions about the quality of his previous work, in spite of all evidence to the contrary. *Dinosaurs on a Spaceship* showed Chibnall as a writer who could take a bizarre request from his producer, and not just work it through logically so that the plot made sense, but then fill that plot with sympathetic and credible individual characters that the audience could care about, before dovetailing beautifully between the lighter and darker aspects of the story and ultimately providing an entirely satisfactory ending. *The Power of Three* showed that he could – in spite of some typically *Doctor Who* 'bad science' – perform the same trick with an 'oddball' story as he had with a romp. Chibnall had, as it happens, written two of the best episodes of *Life on Mars*, before his 1986 appearance on *Open Air* came back to colour his reception in the *Doctor Who* world.

What might Chris Chibnall do with *Doctor Who*, then? The general consensus appears to be that the four stories he's written for the series so far offer up little in the way of clues, but perhaps that isn't the case. In spite of several of them having been written both in something of a hurry and mostly to order from the respective showrunners, there is one thing all of them have in common, and it's something they share with *Broadchurch* too; the sense



of a community under threat and pulling mostly together but in some quarters apart, as that threat makes its presence felt. Chibnall is very strong on character, and equally strong on writing characters reacting differently to being under pressure (we can also see this in his other TV dramas, including in *Torchwood*, so it's hardly unique to his recent work). There's every chance that Chibnall's *Doctor Who* will include a number of scenarios whereby the world is mapped out and thereafter imperilled by some outside force, into which situation the Doctor and companion – or companions, as Chibnall would also appear to favour a slightly larger TARDIS team if his Series Seven stories are any indication – would appear. This sounds like an obvious route for *Doctor Who* to take but it's one that hasn't necessarily seen much emphasis under Steven Moffat. We might perhaps see a slightly larger proportion of two-parters than was the case under his immediate predecessor, too, allowing a little more space for this kind of world-building. It could also be that he simultaneously roots the TARDIS' travels in the companion's

home life, in much the way RTD did. Chibnall, in the infamous *Open Air* clip that has been doing the rounds, also spoke about a progressive *Doctor Who* that would seem to give the lie to those predicting a more traditionalist approach.

Another thing that Chibnall is very strong on is female characters. Almost all of the memorable characters in *Broadchurch* are women, and both *42* and *The Hungry Earth* were led by strong female characters as well. Steven Moffat's *Doctor Who* has been typified by strong roles for women, and that would seem set to continue, perhaps even increase. But there's one elephant hanging over the series that might just possibly be about to be addressed.

It's long been held in certain quarters that a female Doctor should only arrive as and when a female showrunner takes charge of the series. This is actually nonsense, as it is the companion character who is both the identification character for the audience and the most important human character in the drama. The Doctor is an alien, and it is far less imperative that the Doctor be drawn along gender-sensitive lines. Let's face it, you might give an actress of the stature required exactly the same lines as Matt Smith or Peter Capaldi have had, and it would be her interpretation of them that would make her the Doctor, rather than them needing to be rewritten to take account of her gender.

Given that Chris Chibnall appears to favour women in lead roles; given that he appears to favour a progressive approach for the series; and given that we can also predict he might favour a slightly larger regular cast – something that casting a woman in the lead role might benefit from, by way of support for such a radical change – could it be that he will surprise us all by casting a woman as the next Doctor...? Perhaps not. Much of that decision would be up to his superiors at the BBC, rather than being Chibnall's choice alone. But only time will tell, and by 2018, the corporation might well be ready to make that change.

ARTWORK BY SIMON BRETT





THE HIGHLANDERS

As we devote ourselves to the pondering of Civil War - though some may wonder what's so civil about war anyhow - we come to a notable juncture in *Doctor Who's* history. Namely the last stand of the pure historical in what was only the second story of Patrick Troughton's three-year tenure as the Second Doctor in *The Highlanders*, the Battle of Culloden also introducing us to the man who would become the little chap with the Beatle cut's longest serving companion as piper Jamie McCrimmon flees the carnage and in doing so sees more of the universe than just the Highlands...

For the Doctor himself, it's also the petering out of his early post-regenerative interest in trying on headgear - the Tam o' Shanter he sports here is the last head adornment he sports over that aforementioned 'Beatle' barnet. He does, at least, get a tootle on his recently introduced recorder, found after a rummage through his previous incarnation's things immediately before the events of *Power of the Daleks* - proving himself adept at interpreting traditional Scots music. But why did the purely historical, for so long the bedrock of early *Who* alongside the more traditional science fiction elements/episodes, die out in the first place, consigned to the vaults a mere three years after the Doctor first hit our screens?

It would seem that producer Innes Lloyd was the architect of their downfall, ushering in the base under siege format

which would later become a mainstay of the Troughton years as well as saving the BBC a bit of money in the days before the Corporation simply threw money at the Doctor! Of course, the historical itself would return with 1982's *Black Orchid*, which brought with it an interesting twist - the idea of alien intervention in established history which would serve as a template for nearly all of New *Who's* dealings with the past; in itself a radical deviation from the

original ground rules of its pure cousin.

Where originally, no alien technology was present save for the TARDIS and any devices the Doctor may have had about his person, *Black Orchid* posited that a band of Terileptils and an android disguised as the Grim Reaper were at least in part responsible for the Black Death. A few selves back in 1746, though, it was the Redcoats to blame, with no technological assistance whatsoever...

The Jacobites are so keen to suppress





them, they find themselves with a rumpled ally. And it's that recent keen interest in hats that draws he, Ben, and Polly - his previous self's last companions sticking around to ease the winds of change blowing through the venerable police box as of that key first change of Doctor - into the intrigue.

DOCTOR: *I would like a hat like this. How do I look?*

POLLY: *It's got words on it. With Charles our brave and merciful Prince Royal, we'll greatly fall or nobly save our country.*

DOCTOR: *Bah. Romantic piffle.*

ALEXANDER: *You'll pick it up.*

JAMIE: *Careful, like.*

ALEXANDER: *This way with you. Quick!*

Which provides a less than promising introduction to the man who will travel with him until the end of his days in *The War Games*, even after failing to deliver on the bagpipe lesson promised in return for being taken aboard the TARDIS. There's even a sort of reunion in *The Two Doctors* as McCrimmon is returned to his rightful place alongside the man he comes to see as a sort of Time Laird following the success of a covert mission as a Celestial Intervention Agent for his McCartneyite friend as detailed in *World Game*, the Time Lords granting him a new interior for the box he'd dubbed his home in *Tomb of the Cybermen* into the bargain. They won't quite stretch to allowing him sole control, mind...

JAMIE: *Hey, I've not seen that before.*

DOCTOR: *It's not been here before. It's a teleport control. You'd think I'd never flown a TARDIS solo!*

JAMIE: *What's it do?*

DOCTOR: *It gives the Time Lords dual control. Infernal cheek. I shall complain when this is over. Now then, I think we'll just dematerialise to avoid their detection beams, and slip in quietly.*

Ample grounds for complaint indeed, especially given the stress of his CIA-backed excursion into the Napoleonic Wars (as detailed in *World Game*), which turns that lovely scruffy hair grey following the death of his temporary Time Lady companion/handler Serena in what can only be described as a sort of retrospective dry run for a similar pairing between the Fourth Doctor and Romana in the quest for the Key To Time as the carrot of a temporary reprieve for his sentence of enforced regeneration.

DOCTOR: *Ah. What do they look like, these segments? How will I know them?*

GUARDIAN: *They're all disguised.*

DOCTOR: *Yes, I thought they might be.*

GUARDIAN: *They contain the elemental force of the universe. They can be in any shape, form or size.*

DOCTOR: *Then how will I recognise them?*

GUARDIAN: *You will be given a locator.*

DOCTOR: *Thank you.*

GUARDIAN: *And an assistant.*

DOCTOR: *An assistant? Please, sir, on an assignment like this, I'd much rather work alone. In my experience, assistants mean trouble. I have to protect them and show them and teach them and couldn't I just, couldn't I just manage with K9?*

GUARDIAN: *K9 is a mere machine.*

DOCTOR: *He is a very sensitive machine! Sorry, sir.*

GUARDIAN: *You will find your assistant waiting for you in the TARDIS.*

Like Romana, her predecessor initially thinks of the man she's been paired with as a bit of an idiot before learning to respect his sometimes rather well-disguised intelligence! Sadly, unlike the lady the Doctor threatens to dub Fred, she doesn't get the chance to regenerate, as she's shot through both hearts, which robs her of the opportunity...

DOCTOR: *Sorry, I thought you were Romana. Have you seen her? What are you doing here?*

ROMANA: *Regenerating. Do you like it?*

DOCTOR: *Regenerating? What are you talking about, regenerating? Only Time Lords regenerate. Look, it's awfully nice to see you, Princess Astra...*

ROMANA: *Romana.*

DOCTOR: *Romana? Ah.*

K9: *Ah.*

DOCTOR: *Shut up, K9. What are you doing in that body?*

ROMANA: *Regenerating. Do you like it?*

DOCTOR: *But you can't wear that body.*

ROMANA: *I thought it looked very nice on the Princess.*

DOCTOR: *But you can't go round wearing copies of bodies.*

A rule the Doctor himself would break by his twelfth incarnation...

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY



REVIEWS

THE LATEST
DOCTOR WHO
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED



DOCTOR WHO: 365 DAYS OF MEMORABLE MOMENTS AND IMPOSSIBLE THINGS

**AUTHOR: JUSTIN RICHARDS / PUBLISHER: BBC BOOKS/ RELEASE
DATE: OUT NOW**

Not only is this house brick-sized new Doctor Who book the ugliest-looking publication to come our way in quite some time (the drab gun-metal grey cover design makes it look like a block of concrete, and is hardly likely to make it leap out from your friendly neighbourhood bookshop's groaning shelves), it's also quite possibly the most bafflingly-pointless.

With Doctor Who currently in the creative doldrums and only one new episode on the horizon this year (the obligatory Christmas special), it's not even an especially timely release. A more cynical reviewer (some are available) might suggest that the book is intended to keep Doctor Who 'warm' and its fans interested during its latest 'gap' year. But in truth,

there's no particular reason for even the most moderately well-informed fan to invest in this new tome, which really offers no new insights into the 52-year history of the series, and contents itself with just regurgitating well-known storylines, character beats and familiar behind-the-scenes Doctor Who ephemera.

The book's format is relatively simple, if not especially imaginative, chronicling an entire year (January 1st to December 31st, fact fans!) and reiterating key facts from Doctor Who history, by allocating them to a specific date in the calendar, many being transmission dates of particular episodes and first appearances of significant characters (and each incarnation of the Doctor) or acclaimed storylines. Each day covers some significant event or other from Doctor Who history, whilst sidebar panels provide occasionally brief real-world context to the episode or cross-references to other notable moments in Who history (Whostory?), which might have happened on the same day in another era. Some of the entries are more tenuous than others; January 1st introduces us to the Doctor, the random connection to the first day of the year being that the TARDIS apparently landed in Trafalgar Square during New Year celebrations in a 1966 William Hartnell episode, and Paul McGann's 1996 TV movie ended on New Year's Day 2000 in San Francisco. Other dates have rather stronger ties to the series, the first appearance of the Master on 2nd January 1971, the first appearance of the third Doctor on 3rd January 1970 and the fifth Doctor's debut on 4th January 1982. And just to prove that, we've done more than just flick through the first few pages, 15th April marks the beginning of David Tennant's first full series (2006), 12th May recognises that the Doctor

met the Thals again, in a 1973 serial (albeit the screening of the sixth episode of a serial, in which he met up with them in the first), as well as the 1968 birthdate of Catherine Tate (Donna Noble).

Other dates are of slightly greater interest to the more hardcore; 12th November is commemorated as the day in 1964, when the first hardback Doctor Who novel was published and 25th November remembers the first UK newspaper review of the series, by Michael Gowers, in The Daily Mail in 1963. Some entries seem entirely random, however; this reviewer has no idea why the rise of the Cyberking from the 2008 Christmas special The Next Doctor, finds itself on 22nd August and 5th January asks 'When is a Police Box Not a Police Box' purely because a thread in 1985's Attack of the Cybermen involved the TARDIS finally changing shape (briefly), as part of a cheap publicity stunt.

Author Justin Richards has been the Editor of the BBC Doctor Who book range for years, so he knows his stuff and he's clearly relishing recounting familiar on and off-screen stories in a succinct, if dry and humourless style. But it's hard to know quite who this slab of a book – it's printed on cheap paper, and enlivened here and there by some decent illustrations by Freakhouse Graphics – is aimed. There's little new here for long-time fans and newer fans may find it a bit intimidating. But if you're determined to take the plunge, it's best dipped into (as Richards points out in his introduction) rather than read from cover to cover. For that way would surely lie madness and confusion. Now, let's see; June 16th... 'Professor Yana is Not Who He Seems'. Indeed.

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★★★ 5



DOCTOR WHO: THE COMPLETE NINTH SERIES

CERT: 12 / **DIRECTORS:** VARIOUS / **SCREENPLAY:** STEVEN MOFFATT, TOBY WHITHOUSE, JAMIE MATHIESON, PETER HARNNESS, CATHERINE TREGENNA, MARK GATISS, SARAH DOLLAR / **STARRING:** PETER CAPALDI, JENNA COLEMAN, MAISIE WILLIAMS, MICHELLE GOMEZ, JEMMA REDGRAVE / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

Opinion on the most recent seasons of Doctor Who is subjective to say the least. For every fan that thinks that the series, under showrunner Steven Moffat, has become a string of woolly, lumbering, navel-gazing, repetitive, one-note stories devoid of thrill, excitement or incident, there's one who thinks he's elevated it to a higher form of art. Regardless of opinion, though, what's inarguable is that this most recent season is where the show's casual audience finally started losing interest in the latest incarnation of TV's most enduring Time Lord's adventures in Space and Time.

It's frustrating because the ingredients are all here and, as ever with Doctor Who, there's potential for something very special if only the alchemy can be made to work. In Peter Capaldi, we have an astonishingly versatile and enthusiastic actor – and long-time fan – gifted the role of his dreams but often given half-hearted material to work with and an inconsistent characterisation,

thanks to whoever's tasked with piecing together the latest underwhelming adventure. He's not helped this season by the terrible desperation of a production team who refashioned his first year's grumpy, snappy but generally unpopular persona into a vaguely embarrassing Rock God, much given to brandishing an electric guitar, sporting sonic shades (a temporary replacement for the much-abused sonic screwdriver) and wearing hoodies, in the mistaken belief that kids will identify with him because he looks and behaves like them. It demeans both Capaldi and the Doctor. But the actor sometimes rises magnificently above the mediocrity of the material; he's been rightly applauded for his bravura delivery of the 'anti-war' speech in The Zygon Inversion and he carries Moffat's pompous single-hander Heaven Sent, with a zest and verve it doesn't really deserve.

Other regulars in the series make little impact. Jenna Coleman's Clara remains a

blank page (her 'death' in Face the Raven is uncomfortably unemotional and, when it's reversed a couple of episodes later, utterly pointless), Michelle Gomez's Missy returns too soon in the dreadful two-part season opener and has already worn out her welcome, now recrafted into a typical Moffat quip-machine and, despite enthusiasm from the dustier corners of fandom, it's hard to get worked up about the reappearances of new UNIT stalwarts Kate Lethbridge-Stewart (Redgrave) and Osgood (Ingrid Oliver) – the latter killed in Series Eight but, predictably, resurrected here and with a twin sister to boot – because despite a number of appearances in the last few years, no attempt has been made to put flesh on their bones or make them seem like real, believable people in a real, believable world.

But, of course, Steven Moffat isn't interested in real, believable worlds. His vision for the series remains pure fairytale and in series nine we're treated to stories about ghosts, sleep-monsters, comedy Vikings and an immortal teenagers drifting through Time. Fortunately, there's nothing as insultingly appalling here as Series Eight's twee In The Forest of the Night (although 2015's Christmas special The Husbands of River Song, included here along 2014's tiresome Last Christmas, comes dangerously close) but neither is there anything to match the wit, invention and pure joy of much of the work of Moffat's predecessor Russell T Davies. The structure of the series relies largely on two-part episodes but there's really little enough story for one episode and even the gimmick of shifting the tone and even the location of the second episode of

some of these extended stories, can't disguise the thinness of the narratives. The best episodes are those not written by Moffat – the showrunner's efforts now constantly revisit old themes, and he just can't leave the show's history and chronology alone – but even those episodes can't escape the sense of ennui and stagnation, which now permeates a show which has, temporarily we hope, run right out of steam. Change is in the air, of course, for the 2018 Series but for now Series Nine may be a must-buy for completists but casual viewers are likely to give this one a miss, just as most of them did when it was screened on TV.

In fairness, the box set does boast a generous four hours of special features. Most of them are BBC puff-pieces; the online 'Doctor Who Extra' making-of snippets for each episode, some DVD-exclusive pieces on Clara's 'journey', the Daleks and an interesting but brief segment on how new writer Sarah Dollard came to contribute her first script Face the Raven. Add the 2015 ComiCon panel, Star Trek's Will Wheaton interviewing Capaldi, three breezy commentaries (including Mark Gatiss and Reece Sheersmith on Gatiss' Sleep No More), trailers and deleted scenes and you've got plenty of Who bang for your buck – but you might want to take a pass on 'The Fan Show' compilation, hosted by an irredeemably smug fan, who really has far too much access to the Doctor Who Team than is really healthy, and has far too high an opinion of herself, clearly thinking she is a comic genius. Word to the wary; she isn't.

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★ 5





DOCTOR WHO - THE WAR DOCTOR VOL. 2: INFERNAL DEVICES

DIRECTOR: NICHOLAS BRIGGS / **AUTHORS:** JOHN DORNEY, PHIL MULRYNE, MATT FITTON / **STARRING:** JOHN HURT, JACQUELINE PEARCE, DAVID WARNER, JAMIE NEWALL / **PUBLISHER:** BIG FINISH / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

Doctor Who: The War Doctor Vol. 2: Infernal Devices continues to follow the exploits of the War Doctor during the legendary Time War. Volume One was very much the vision of Big Finish supremo Nicholas Briggs, but this time each of the three stories has its own writer, which does give this second volume

a more episodic feel and that's not a criticism by any means. It was Nick Briggs's intention that these stories could be listened to out of sequence, and to a point that has been achieved, although you'll get more of the epic scale of the war from listening to the episodes in order.

Legion of the Lost by John

Dorney opens Volume Two and it's a particularly horrifying tale of just how far the Gallifreyans are willing to go to end their conflict with the Daleks once and for all. It begs the question of 'should victory be sought at any cost'? A Thing of Guile by Phil Mulryne follows Legion of the Lost, in which the Doctor is branded a war criminal and is coerced into accompanying Cardinal Ollistra (Jacqueline Pearce) on what seems to be a suicide mission behind enemy lines. Matt Fitton's The Neverwhen concludes this box set and what a chilling conclusion it makes, where both warring sides are forever locked in battle. The dead are revived in order to fight and die again, and again, and again...

John Hurt effortlessly imbues the War Doctor with a sense that this is a good man having to put aside his principles and beliefs, as he travels further and further along the path that will eventually have him committing double genocide in order to end the Time War. Only an actor of Hurt's calibre can allow the listener to empathise with such an embittered and self-doubting Doctor. As each side commits ever-increasing acts of atrocities, despair and darkness consume the Doctor

more until he is forced to do what he feels is necessary.

David Warner offers another magnificent performance in this box sets first story, as the mad technomancer Shadovar. It's reminiscent of his role as Evil, in Terry Gilliam's Time Bandits and wholly suitable for his performance here.

Jacqueline Pearce reprises her role as the duplicitous Cardinal Ollistra and she makes the perfect antagonist to Hurt's War Doctor. With her silky tone it's difficult to decide whether to love her or hate her. She's a despicable character in a deliciously slinky way.

And love it or hate it, Howard Carter's War Doctor theme can be heard again. If you haven't heard it yet, imagine Rammstein composing a version of the theme. Lots of ringing anvils that creates a suitably militaristic tone.

Big Finish productions are always a sonic feast for the ears and this is no exception. The stories are compelling and the soundscape is astonishing, so close your eyes and visualise the action in your mind.

CHRISTIAN JONES

★★★★★★★★★ 9



THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES 5.2: THE LABYRINTH OF BUDA CASTLES

DIRECTOR: NICHOLAS BRIGGS / **AUTHOR:** EDDIE ROBSON / **STARRING:** TOM BAKER, LALLA WARD, KATE BRACKEN, MARK BONNAR / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

The Fourth Doctor and Romana really liked their European holidays. In City of Death, one of the most renowned and classic Who stories, they ran around Paris gleefully taking in its architecture and culture,

gushing about how wonderful it all is and Romana being pedantic about his musical quotes. Eddie Robson, one of Big Finish's best writers when it comes to comedy, provides a lightness and wit reminiscent

of Douglas Adams' writing for the show – well, it's not quite as hilarious as an Adams script, but then again, what is? Tom Baker, needless to say, is on fine form with his sardonic charm – "I do enjoy meeting tiresome men, I get so few opportunities to be properly disdainful these days".

The threat they encounter is less typically alien and more horror-inflected, for a vampire resides in the labyrinth underneath Buda Castle. Mark Bonnar, who recently appeared as unhinged Time Lord the Eleven in Doom Coalition, is quickly becoming Big Finish's go-to villain; here, he puts in a very different but equally sinister performance. Even when Zoltán Frid seems to be human, he's deeply unsettling, as we first meet him when he rudely insists on dining with Romana in a cafe; his aggressive misogyny is never forgotten throughout his supernatural killing spree. The Doctor Who franchise has done vampires many times before, but Robson and Bonnar's take on the mythos is as original as it is spine chilling.

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The other memorable supporting character is Celia Soames, an enthusiastic vampire hunter on the trail of Frid, whom she believes to be Dracula himself. Having a British detective in the second companion role is a deliberate allusion to City of Death's Duggan, and yet the secret Celia hides sets her apart as a truly fascinating character, as does the great performance from Being Human's Kate Bracken. The downside, perhaps, is that we don't get to spend a lot of time with characters native to Budapest; similarly, by focusing on the labyrinth and a few other not-too-distinctive settings, this audio never captures the spirit of the city the same way City of Death captured Paris.

Nevertheless, The Labyrinth of Buda Castle is a fast-paced adventure that carefully balances its witty charm with its genuinely spooky take on the vampire. Fans of Tom Baker's Doctor Who won't be disappointed by this release.

KIERON MOORE

★★★★★★★★★ 8

From the classic era of Doctor Who

LETHBRIDGE STEWART



MOON BLINK



SADIE MILLER (MOON BLINK) - INTERVIEW

MOON BLINK is the latest in a new series of books chronicling the adventures of Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart. Written by **SADIE MILLER**, the daughter of the beloved and much-missed Elisabeth Sladen, who played Sarah Jane Smith from 1974 to 1976, returning to the series in 2006 and a spin-off for the character until her death in 2011. We caught up with the National Youth Theatre-trained actor about her new direction and fans can expect...

STARBURST: Did your move into writing come about from a conscious decision to change your career?

Sadie Miller: Definitely. I always used to write as a sideline anyway, it was always something I was interested in doing but then when everything happened with Mum it just seemed like a more logical progression really because I think, although it's still very challenging, you have a lot more control over it and it's not something you have to work away from home for.

How did your involvement with the Lethbridge-Stewart book series – and consequently *Moon Blink* – come about? It was something that Andy [Frankham-Allen, author and series editor]

contacted me about. We'd been like ships in the night, we'd almost met and worked together a few times before but when he approached me about it, it sounded like a perfect fit and it's been quite challenging to write for a character who's so well-known, so hopefully it'll go down well but it's been really good fun so far.

How familiar were you with the established character of the Brigadier?

I had to go back and watch all the old ones with Mum although I knew of the character and knew the basics but there's a lot of the ins-and-outs I wasn't so familiar with and for something like this I think you've got to know your details and make sure it's all accurate.

How aware were you, growing-up, of the popularity both of *Doctor Who*, and your mother's part in its legacy?

I was aware of it through the conventions mainly and I'd watch a bit of it growing up but I honestly don't think it was until Mum passed away that I realised where she kind of stands in the Universe of it all. It was only afterwards when I thought 'wow, this is much bigger than I thought it was.'

And, of course, your mother worked with Nicholas Courtney, who played the Brigadier on TV, both in *Doctor Who* and in his final appearance in the *Sarah Jane* series. Did she speak fondly about her time working with him?

Oh yes, they were very chummy and when he was down for *Sarah Jane* they had a good time together on set. That kind of friendship passing down through the years from that original crew meant there was always a lot of love between them all.

What are you working on next? Will you be writing any more for the Lethbridge-Stewart series or are you keen to develop your own projects, possibly even a bit of scriptwriting?

Hopefully, I can do a bit of both. I'll see how the book goes and if people like it and want to read more and we'll go from there. I have another book I'm just working on for myself which I'm trying to get edited and find a home for so hopefully that'll get published at some point in 2016 as well, which would be great. It's just about getting my head down and seeing what happens; it's very hard these days as a writer, it's challenging because it's so easy to publish online nowadays. Scriptwriting isn't something I've done before. There's a Wilkie Collins story I love called *The Haunted Hotel*, which is not a very well-known story and I've adapted it into a radio script and I'm trying to find a home for that somewhere but it's not something I've spent a lot of time looking into but it's definitely something to think about for the future.

PAUL MOUNT

Sadie's book MOON BLINK is published by Candy Jar Books in April.



STARBURST

LIVVY BOOTE is...

THE GIRL FROM X PLANET X

It all started with Harry Potter. Ron and Hermione clearly have some sort of tension building between them, but through Harry's perspective, we can't see it develop much. We wonder, how did this start? What does Hermione feel when she looks at Ron, and vice versa? We must know.

So, with a little shame in our hearts, we search the Internet for 'Ron and Hermione', hoping that we might find something - *anything* - that might fill in the gaps we missed.

And then we find it. A website called 'fanfiction.net' pops up. Clicking on it, we find hundreds of stories, thousands even, all about Harry Potter couples that we hadn't even considered. We read one. And then another. We read about Harry and Draco hiding their forbidden feelings for each other. Ginny and Hermione. Neville and Luna. And so, the addiction begins, until you're sitting at your own computer, writing about Harry sending Ron flirtatious glances during Defence Against the Dark Arts classes.

Fan-fiction is something that most people find either embarrassing, weird, or somehow perverted. If you write it, most of the time you pretend you don't know what it is - but if you're talking amongst your fan friends, you boast about it, even sending chapters for them to edit. It becomes a way of life, an art even. Your grammar and writing skills are better than some legit published authors, according to your readers. But why is it embarrassing?



"Data did WHAT to Picard...?!"

Well, maybe because of all the steamy gay sex scenes you wrote about Dumbledore and Grindelwald.

So if it's so embarrassing, why do we do it?

You'll probably have figured from the way I've spoken about fan-fiction so far that I've written my own, too. It's true, I have. But actually, unless my parents walk in whilst I'm writing it and ask me what I'm doing ('I'm writing... my very own *Star Trek* episode, Dad. Cool,

eh...?') I'm not at all ashamed of writing erotic sci-fi fan-fiction. And nor should the people who've had their stories read aloud on telly by celebrities trying to humiliate them.

You might write it because you've seen a couple that you really like on telly and you'd like to develop some more details, or maybe you've written something where there's no romance or sex involved at all, which is also fair enough. There are all sorts of reasons why you might write or read a fan-fic. But more often than not, the motives go a lot deeper than this.

I am a bisexual woman who is sick of seeing straight couples all over the place, everywhere I look. In my favourite TV shows, perfume adverts, every Hollywood movie ever. So, you know what? Sometimes I do want to write an innocent story about Korra and Asami from *Avatar: The Legend of Korra* going on a cute date. And yes, I get incredibly excited and hopeful for the future of sci-fi when I see *The 100*'s Clarke and Lexa developing an interesting, complex relationship.

Fan-fiction is feminist. It allows people, particularly women, to channel their sexuality in a society which frowns upon us doing so at all, save when we're being objectified. We can write about love and sex. In fact, I've learned pretty much all of my sex ed from fan-fiction. We can talk about it without embarrassment because we're all there on fanfiction.net or Archive of Our Own for the same

Archive of Our Own beta

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Welcome to the Archive of Our Own!

We're a fan-created, fan-run, non-profit, non-commercial archive for transformative fanworks, like fanfiction, fanart, fan videos, and podfic.

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Archive of Our Own - The Land of the Free

FAN-FICTION - WHY ARE SO MANY FEMALE FANS OBSESSED WITH IT?

reason. And, with this freedom combined with a passion for our fandoms, we can explore LGBT relationships properly in a way that the media often refuses. Here, women can explore sex without shame.

So, fan-fic allows us to imagine queer female couples anonymously and without fear. And yet, it doesn't stop there. It seems that most female fans (and I daresay a lot of male fans too), whether straight or not, are most drawn towards male gay couples.

Star Trek's Kirk and Spock pretty much started fan-fiction. Even in the '60s, viewers saw the bond between the two of them and began secretly passing around stories to each other, stories where Kirk and Spock could be together without judgement. *Star Trek* was a show that broke boundaries, so it's not surprising that gay fan-fiction began there. Imagine girls passing around chapters of Spock/Kirk smut to each other in the middle of the night. It was a way for everyone to free their imaginations and sexuality.

And yet it is strange that even now, gay male smut seems to be especially popular. Having given it some deep thought, I've come to the conclusion that this may be a consequence of the male gaze.

Women experience sexual objectification every day - cat-calling, adverts of half-naked women, and the music industry. And in television and movies, women are often used merely as a romantic interest to drive a male protagonist's plot - you know, the 'my wife lasted two minutes in this movie and then she died, so now I'm angry' story. Or, 'here's a handsome male superhero and this is an action movie but it'd be wrong without a love interest, so let's bring in a random girl who has one line in the whole film to make it clear that he can get some'. It's rare that we see relationships developing female characters properly without objectifying them. We're plastered on billboards everywhere, lying in uncompromising positions in the adverts in *Vogue*, accessories draped off us like we're hat stands.

When we write and read fan-fiction, particularly women and the LGBT community, I think, we seek a story where the men, for once, are sexualised, where we can gaze upon the men. We can reverse the point of view. Straight, bisexual, asexual, pansexual women find such fan-fiction sexually appealing because we are witnessing male



People have always seen a romantic connection between Spock and Kirk

characters in a sexual scenario, even if it is a homosexual relationship. The roles have been reversed. For everyone else, it might be appreciated as a breath of fresh air, or maybe we just really, really believe that these characters would be romantically or sexually involved, therefore enjoying reading their story even if we don't find it attractive, *per se*.

Fan-fiction is considered shameful amongst many members of fandom communities, and the 'outside world'. It's sexualising characters who don't exist, and that just seems a bit weird. Except, it's clearly a lot more than that.

There are particularly a lot of male fans who take issue with fan-fiction, considering it a frivolous pastime (as if watching *Battlestar Galactica* wasn't also just a fun thing to do). On reading an interesting commentary on Tumblr (shout-out to fozmeadows.tumblr.com) my theories were asserted - that straight white cisgender men see themselves represented everywhere, and to not be represented in fan-fiction was a change that made them uncomfortable. Such male fans are stereotyped as being like archivists - remembering every moment from every episode ever. To not fit into this makes you a 'fake fan'. And, as it

seems more often than not that female fans prefer to explore cosplay and fan-fiction rather than *Filofax* every episode of *Buffy* away in their head, they're considered fake fans.

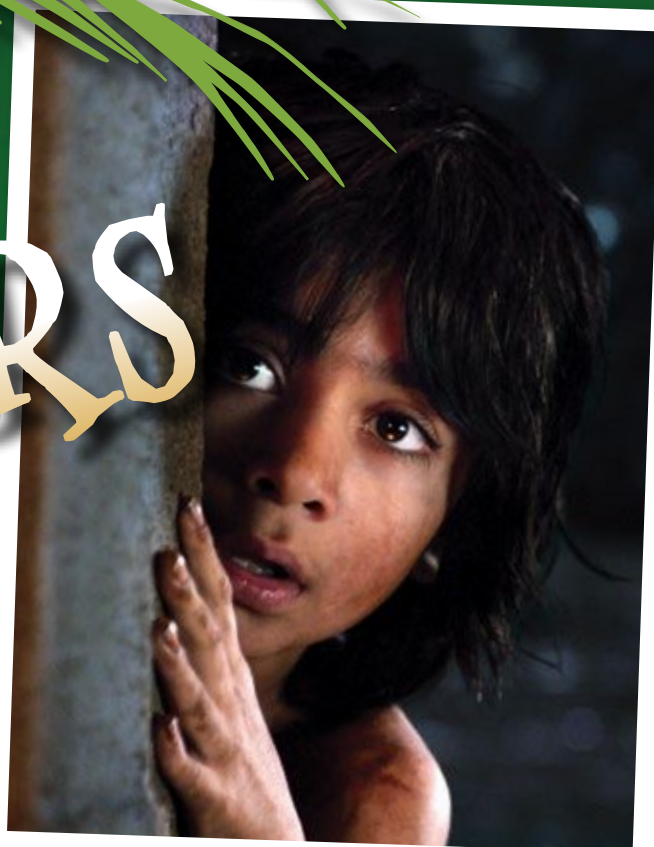
So, even within the sci-fi and fantasy community, fan-fiction is considered stupid, embarrassing, and a sign that you are a perverted 'fake geek girl'.

Naturally, I'm not saying that every female fan likes to write fan-fic and that no male fans write or read it. I've read plenty of good stuff that's written by guys. And there are plenty of people who don't identify as men or women. I don't want to stereotype anyone here, and I sincerely hope I haven't.

With all this considered, it seems that fan-fiction is a medium through which LGBT men and women can imagine their favourite characters as bisexual, transgender, or just in a well-developed, loving relationship, because the show they love has not portrayed their characters in this way despite each of these scenarios being entirely possible of being canon. And so, it should not be considered an embarrassing thing - perhaps, rather, a freeing thing, which can influence the media's depictions of couples, love, and female characters for the best.

KING OF THE SWINGERS

STARBURST looks at Disney's upcoming star-studded live-action remake of Disney's 1967 animated favourite THE JUNGLE BOOK.



BY JACK BOTTOMLEY



Some stories and characters never get old. True, they are often updated and sprinkled with a bit of modernity here, and a bit of contemporary gender/racial shifts there, but the stories themselves are essentially the same. Literary works like Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan* stories, Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve's *La Belle et la Bête* (*Beauty and the Beast*), Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* and Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories all stand as examples. And within that list of examples, did you notice something? Disney has adapted all of them (in one way or another) over the years, from animated classics to lavish live-action blockbusters. Of the many brilliant stories brought to the stage, television and big screen, one that instantly comes to mind as a wild adventure is Rudyard Kipling's 1894 assortment of stories, *The Jungle Book*.

Kipling's two *Jungle Book* books (1894-5) have inspired countless reprints, at least seven (soon to be eight with Warner Brothers' *Jungle Book: Origins* due next year) films (some sequels, some straight-to-video), a TV series, and even an anime series. Kipling's book is beloved, and its characters are iconic. However, of the many adaptations in existence, arguably the most revered is The House of Mouse's 1967 animated feature. So, this year, director Jon Favreau goes from *Iron Man* to Man Cub, as he helms this live-action remake of the much-loved animated musical classic. So, as Disney head back to the jungle again this year, we ask - with the glut of Disney remakes of late - will catching this in cinemas be bare necessity or will we regret listening to Kaa when she (this film marks the first time the spellbinding serpent has portrayed by a woman) urges us to "Trust in Me..."

Well, for starters, it's worth saying that, while this is a remake of the '67 film, Favreau's movie is not quite a carbon copy. This is going to be an adventure that feels more savage and quite serious in tone. So much is this the case that, at first glance, this seems very much like an adaptation of the book as opposed to a remake of the animated musical. In fact, the only thing that points to the contrary is the teaser's closing shot of Baloo and Mowgli drifting down the river, with a few seconds of whistling to the tune of one of the film's most popular tunes. However, this more intense approach is intentional because while indeed a remake, the filmmakers have included more material from the source text in an attempt to give a more 'dangerous' edge to this revisited journey. Whereas the childlike spirit filled every frame of the original, this approach seems visually darker (much like the recent live action Disney re-imaginings *Snow White and the Huntsman* and *Maleficent*), with the action taking on a more realistic vibe. However, unlike some of the aforementioned live-action Disney re-dos, and this is where understandably cynical audiences may have cause to get more excited, *The Jungle Book* 2016 is not forgetting its roots.

The original is so well known (for one of many reasons) because of its music, particularly the memorable songs penned by Richard M. and the late Robert B. Sherman. Those among us who have never hummed along to or sang out loud the lyrics to the likes of 'I Wanna Be Like You', have truly never lived! So it may come as great news that not only will the songs 'Bare Necessities' and 'Trust in Me' be featured in this version of the story but the great Richard M. Sherman is back and has written brand new songs for this film, alongside a score by John Debney. *The Jungle Book* may be looking to be edgier or more perilous in presenting this well-known story, but it's clearly not going to be at the expense of the sing songs that made us all look so fondly on the original in the first place. So, musically, there is a closeness; but what of the narrative itself? Well, obviously some details are not known, but the central plot is much the same, with young boy Mowgli (Neel Sethi), raised by wolves, being forced to flee all he knows because of the threat of man-hating/fearing bengal tiger Shere Khan (Idris Elba). Aiding him on this epic adventure through the perilous Indian jungle is black panther Bagheera (Ben Kingsley) and Bear Baloo (Bill Murray).



So we take this familiar journey again, once more with the support of some toe-tapping melodies, but this is no ordinary take on the timeless tale. Despite the natural element of the story, this film looks set to stun with its embrace of new technologies. Presented in IMAX 3D and with special effects by the Moving Picture Company (*Godzilla*, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *The Martian*, *Prometheus*, among many others) and Peter Jackson's Weta Digital, the visuals are aiming to take breathers aplenty from a widespread - and multigenerational - audience. The animals have been created using real-life wildlife mannerisms, with the actors instilling their performance into the digital creatures through motion capture. In fact, Jim Henson's Creature Shop not only assisted in the motion capture process, but they created life-sized puppets for the actors to interact with, which ought to ensure more honest performances and seamless blending of the live action with the green screen backdrops or digital characters. Thus far, the animal action has been stunning (and pleased a lot of animal welfare groups in the process), and *The Jungle Book* seems hell bent on turning the already picturesque wilds of





Christopher Walken, who will be wanting to walk and talk like you as primate King Louie, as he tries to learn the secret of the red flower (fire).

This is one star-studded animal kingdom and it will all be under the watchful eye of director Favreau, who has stated that for all the special effects on display, *"It needs to have a beating heart in there, and that is what your cast brings you."* Having a fondness for the original after it impacted his childhood, Favreau looks to do justice to a story that has crossed generations and a film that still ranks highly as one of Disney Animation Studio's most cherished works. It is a tall order, but with the talent involved in front of the camera, behind it, and beneath the CGI critters, *The Jungle Book* certainly has the ability to deliver the goods. There have been a fair few live-action Disney makeovers of late - some good, some bad - and only time will tell whether *The Jungle Book* will be able to sit atop the food chain once again. Remakes are probably not going away anytime soon but if they are filled with a talented team, and a cast and crew who have a passion for the source material, then surely we should not have as much cause for concern. Or as Baloo might put it, *"Forget about your worries and your strife. I mean the bare necessities. That's why a bear can rest at ease. With just the bare necessities of life" ...yeah, man!*

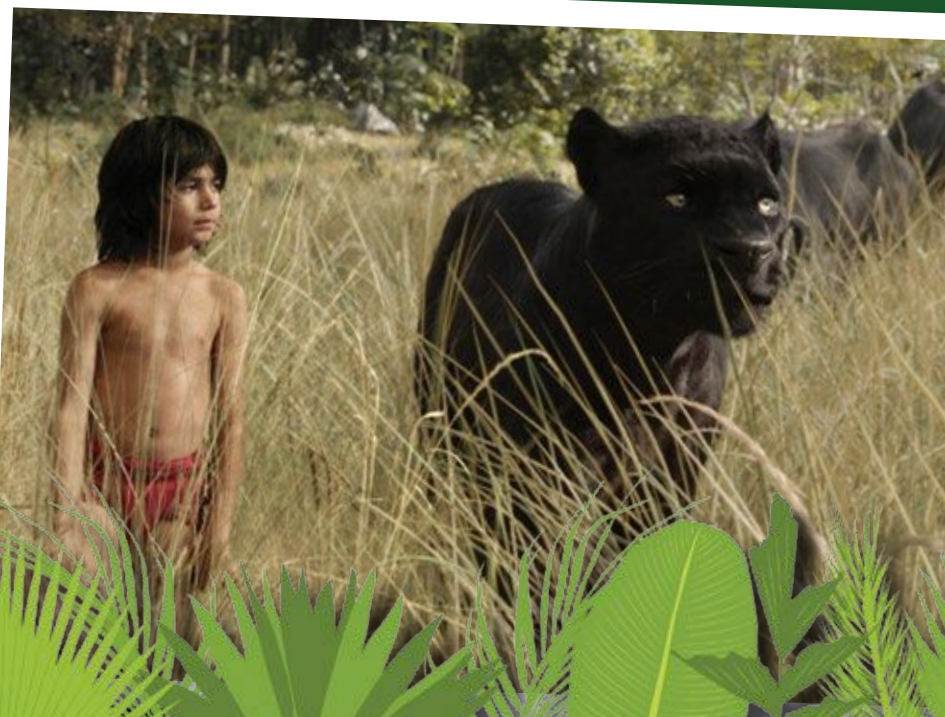
India into an adventurous wonderland, befitting of the greatest of fictional worlds ever brought to the big screen.

However, Justin Marks' (who wrote *Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun-Li* but we won't hold that against him) screenplay and its characters also look set to deliver odd distinct touches, alongside this technologically abetted visual impact. As already mentioned, the devious python Kaa will be portrayed by a woman in this version of the story; additionally, the character of Orangutan King Louie has been altered, with Louie now being based more on the gigantic extinct Gigantopithecus, as Orangutans are not native to India (The Wildlife Channel will be pleased by that amendment). Also interesting is the news that Ritesh Rajan (TV's *Stitchers*) will play Mowgli's father (the non-wolf kind that is) in the film. This could suggest an origin element to Favreau's film, which might just spur on the central tale of Mowgli finding refuge from the paw-clawed clutches of the malicious mammal Shere Khan. So no doubt there will be some undisclosed emotional elements that will accompany Disney's update.

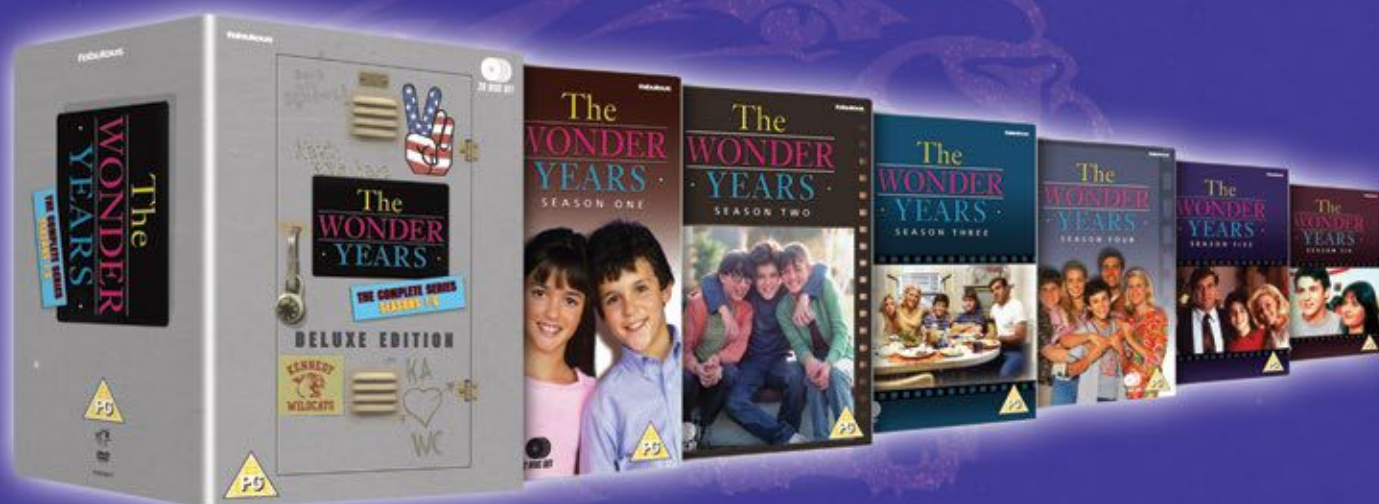
Speaking of the characters, perhaps the biggest drawing point to this new take of Disney's animated feature is the exceptional cast on display. Young Neel Sethi, who could be a breakout star as Mowgli, is the lone fresh face of what is

a film featuring many kings and queens of the cinematic jungle. Former Ghostbuster and all around gut-buster Bill Murray makes his Disney debut to voice Baloo in the film and Ben Kingsley, who is lending his sophisticated tones to Bagheera, will accompany him in a co-leading vocal role. They are joined by the villains of the film in the blackwidow-turned-reptilian rascal Scarlett Johansson as Kaa and the beautiful casting of the mighty Idris Elba as the tantalisingly terrible tiger Shere Khan. Also lending their vocals to the film are *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*' Lupita Nyong'o and *Breaking Bad*'s Giancarlo Esposito as Mowgli's wolf mother Raksha and pack leader Akela respectively. It is for sure a packed crowd, although one of the most exciting names involved is

The Jungle Book lies on its back and floats its way down the river into UK cinemas on April 15th.



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A STARK WINTER...

by Chris Haydon

After a painful cliffhanger of an ending to Season Five, *GAME OF THRONES* is set to return. So let's catch up with what has occurred and speculate on what we can expect to see in this sixth outing to George R. R. Martin's wondrous and ever shocking world...



Across fifty hours of HBO's flagship fantasy epic *Game of Thrones*, audiences have become perceptive to just how each season makes its exit. The penultimate ninth episode usually provides a devastating twist, death, or departure, which then sets up the season finale, leaving the world firmly on a knife's edge as the closing credits roll.

However, the formula was subtly shifted by showrunners David Benioff and D. B. Weiss as we said farewell to Season Five. Our last venture in Westeros quite literally climaxed on a knife's edge being buried into perhaps the show's singular 'all-good' character.

It's cruel and uncompromising being a *Game of Thrones* fan; never are we wise to who's safe, who's next, or,

indeed, just what limits the network is willing to test our nerve (last season sparked thunderous outrage following a particularly vile rape sequence between Sophie Turner's downtrodden Sansa Stark and Iwan Rheon's unflinching villain Ramsay Bolton/Snow).

And yet, despite often being taxing, draining, and disheartening, there is not a single other show quite like it. Nothing that fuels such intrigue and debate, causes mass hysteria across the globe's social spheres, keeps you guessing and grinding through every single hour. Heck, even those caught up with George R. R. Martin's slowly delayed *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels can't truly predict the outcomes...

Many shows are trying to replicate the gusty, grisly brew that is *Game of Thrones*



- such as blood-and-boobs extravaganza *Vikings* and ITV's clumsy primetime effort *Beowulf: Return to the Shieldlands* - but their cocktails are missing vital ingredients. They lack the urgency and gusto, the prolonged emotional scarring, the deep-seeded connectivity between product and consumer.

Arriving right on schedule this April is the eagerly-awaited sixth season, which will once again transport viewers back to the complex landscapes of Martin's mind, but what is likely to play out is ten hours of unpredictable, unprecedented mayhem as our principal characters face their toughest challenges yet.

If Season Five taught us a single thing, it's that power does not mean control. Rule and reign are dress-up terms that lack the

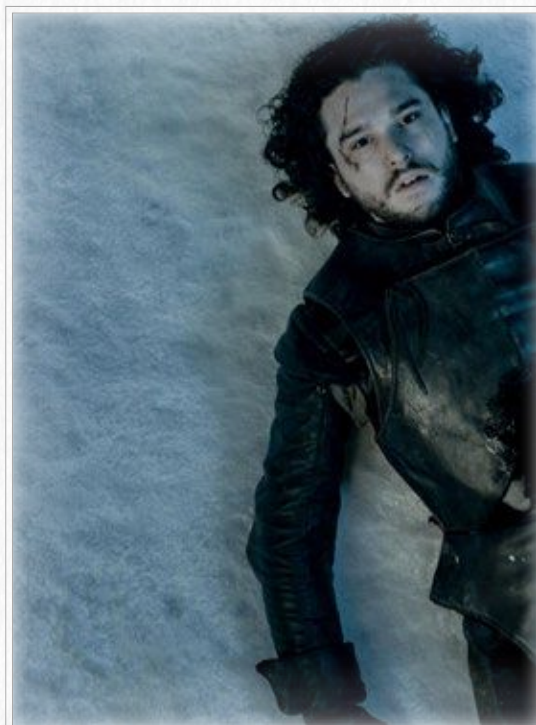
strength to withstand an uprising. Across the principal lands of Westeros, this was extremely evident. In Winterfell, the Boltons have successfully acquired the kingdom, and yet the one who truly believes in his right to rule is catching his reflection in the glossy shimmer of Valyrian Steel.

Ramsay parades through the snow-soaked North like a puff-chested peacock, but really it is in father Roose's (Michael McElhatton) corrupt hands, and potentially soon to be in-line for his forthcoming baby son. Meanwhile in King's Landing, a sour-smirking Margaery Tyrell (Natalie Dormer) has successfully laced young and impressionable King Tommen Baratheon (Dean-Charles Chapman) around her fingers, pushing mother Cersei Lannister

(Lena Headey) down a peg or two.

Unquestionably the sternest, most calculated female presence in the show, isn't going to sit back and watch her land be overthrown, but her defiance is costly. Granting the religious order The Faith Militant and the humble High Sparrow (Jonathan Pryce) with the crown's approval saw her turn from scowling matriarch into a bruised and belittled public hate figure, forced to strip down and take the walk of shame.

Perhaps the biggest and most shocking power-switch was spawned in Meereen. Across the entirety of the show's duration, Daenerys Targaryen (Emilia Clarke) has been the 'Free-Queen'; a ruler who shows compassion and respect to her followers, granting them the choice to stand



alongside her, or opt for their own life-path.

Whilst a portion of her Unsullied army remains loyal, the people have taken back their homeland. The bloodthirsty Sons of the Harpy infiltrated and snatched core members from her Small Council, the masses revolted at the fighting pits, and as she narrowly escapes from certain death, she is greeted by Dothraki bloodriders who have never been entirely happy with the 'Khaleesi' honour.

Fellow primary characters aren't faring much better either. Beloved Arya Stark's (Maisie Williams) punishment for stealing from the Many-Faced God is blindness, Winterfell escapees Sansa and Theon 'Reek' Greyjoy (Alfie Allen) take a trip over the castle wall into the sparse abyss, and Tyrion Lannister (Peter Dinklage) is left

to pick up the pieces of a war-torn land alongside Grey Worm (Jacob Anderson) and Varys (Conleth Hill).

What sets the tone for Season Six is uncertainty. Whether that's fate, fortune or freedom. Perhaps the biggest question mark lingering in audience's minds is that of hero Jon Snow (Kit Harington). The aforementioned Lord Commander of The Night's Watch was betrayed by his brothers following the White Walker attack at Hardhome, which takes the lives of many Night's Watchmen and allied Wildlings (a primary source for conflicting opinions upon The Wall).

Snow is stabbed multiple times by his Black Brothers who deem him a 'traitor', and we rise upwards and fade to black on the image of his lifeless body, slowly



painting the icy ground below crimson. And yet, despite our favourite bastard being very clearly deceased, he is the primary face of promotion for the upcoming season.

The initial teaser poster released shows a blood-splattered Snow staring sombrely, whilst the more recent and truly shocking TV spot hones in on his facade aligned with the many inside The House of Black and White's skin-crawling 'Hall of Faces'. All this leads to a single question: is Jon Snow *really* dead?

Game of Thrones is very capable of mass-murdering everyone we know and love, but it isn't quite as good at resurrection. A big theory (and it is a theory) is that temptress and witch Melisandre (Carice van Houten) will revive the Lord Commander; entirely possible considering

she has lost both her loves within a single season - there is little chance of Stannis Baratheon (Stephen Dillane) returning...

But rumours aside, there are a handful of facts we do know about the new season. Firstly, the much-missed Bran Stark (Isaac Hempstead Wright) is returning, as is The Hound (Rory McCann). We can also expect to put a face to the mysterious Khal Jhaqo, screen legend Max Von Sydow will star alongside the returning Stark, and Richard E. Grant will feature in a currently undisclosed role. Ian McShane has a brief cameo appearance also.

Viewers can expect an alteration in the show's exquisite opening titles too, as we will be returning to Catelyn Stark's childhood home of Riverrun for the first time since Season Three. Clive Russell's Uncle Brynden Tully will be ashore too, and he hasn't been seen since the gruelling Red Wedding, which took many a Stark's life.

Furthermore, Dorne will feature heavily as razor-sharp beauties The Sand Snakes continue their assault on the capital, and Benioff and Weiss have confirmed that King's Landing Queen Mothers Cersei and Olenna Tyrell (Diana Rigg) will go head-to-head throughout; something bound to cause explosive fireworks in the Iron Throne's homeland.

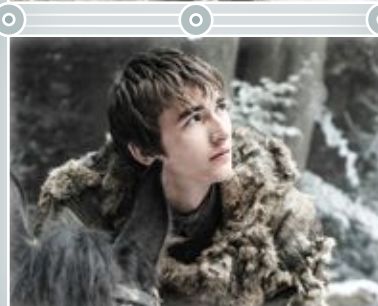
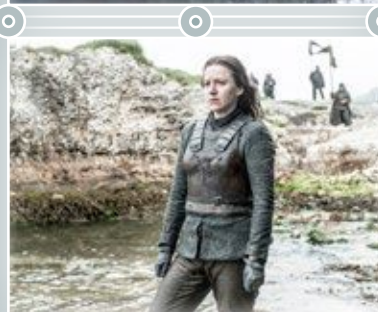
This will also be the first time in the show's history in which the episodes will actually precede the book's narrative. Martin confirmed late last year that he will not be scripting a single episode of Season Six, due to his commitment to the sixth book (*The Winds of Winter*) in the series, but a gaggle of seasoned show directors are on hand to deliver the cinematic prowess of HBO's leading drama.

Jeremy Podeswa will curate the first two episodes, Daniel Sackheim will handle three and four, whilst Jack Bender manages five and six. Mark Mylod holds the reigns for the seventh and eighth episodes, and Miguel Sapochnik (*Hardhome*) has the privilege of seeing Season Six out with the climatic two hours.

What really makes the show's return desperately exciting, however, is just how little we know. In an age entirely dictated by endless spoilers, overly revealing trailers and promotion, script leaks, set photography and more, somehow the largest percentage of Season Six remains cloaked in ambiguity. Apart from the usual protocols being in operation as we begin (remember to stay away from Twitter following the episode airing in the United States...), there has been a finite amount to truly taint the joy of the reveal.

The forthcoming ten episodes which lie ahead for our ensemble cast are bound to be bold, brilliant and brutal. As we edge our toes ever closer into the murkiness of the unknown, the treachery has never seemed more afoot. The night is dark and full of terrors, and we simply cannot wait for that sun to set.

GAME OF THRONES Season Six returns to Sky Atlantic HD with a simulcast of the HBO broadcast at 2am on Monday 25th April; for those who can wait, it's screened again at 9pm.



DO NOT ADJUST YOUR SET

AWAIT FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS - SET REPORT

BY MARTIN UNSWORTH

STARBURST GOES ON LOCATION IN YORKSHIRE FOR AN EXCITING NEW FILM STARRING THE LEGENDARY DAVID BRADLEY. WANT TO KNOW MORE? AWAIT FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS...

On the outskirts of a tiny village just outside of York is a hidden gem; a film studio in which the editors of this esteemed magazine have been granted a visit to catch a day's filming on a new sci-fi/horror thriller, entitled *Await Further Instructions*. GSP Studios has seen all manner of productions over recent times and has a fascinating history of its own. Formally a pig farm, it was turned into an acting college before the passing of the owner, and its renovation to the glorious facility it is today. It has a dedicated green screen wall, but that's not in use for this movie. Instead, there's a stunningly split-level recreation of a normal, terraced family home. It's in this location that the majority of the film will take place, and as we walk around the set, we can already feel a sense of tension and claustrophobia.

The film in question is the brainchild of writer Gavin Williams, who gained great praise for his short film *Sleepworking* when it toured the festivals in 2014. With a talented director, Johnny Kevorkian (*The Disappeared*) and an equally brilliant cast - headed by veteran actor David Bradley (*Game of Thrones*, *The Strain*, and *Harry Potter*) - it's clear the film is going to be something special. But what of the plot? Short of giving away too many secrets, the movie takes place over a tense Christmas in the Milgram household, where their estranged son, Nick (Sam Gittens), has brought his girlfriend, Annji (Neeja Naik), for the Yuletide get-together. Family tensions flare and old wounds are opened as it's

clear there's something wrong with the domestic unit. Father Tony (Grant Masters) struggles with his emotions as he tries to keep things under control while Grandad (Bradley) displays what can only be called old-time values and ignorance when it comes to accepting Annji.

As the young couple prepare to make an early getaway from the strife on Christmas morning, they find they are trapped inside the house by a mysterious black substance. It has sealed the doors and the windows. They have no idea what's



On location: David Bradley with our Editor Jordan Royce.



DOORS AND AWAIT

going on. Nuclear war? Terrorist attack? Prank? The already overwrought situation descends even further into panic and anger. Hoping for answers, they turn on the television - but there's no signal; the only thing they can get on there is a simple written, portentous, message: stay indoors and await further instructions.

After being shown around the impressive set, we settle down and manage to grab some time with the people involved. Director Johnny Kevorkian's enthusiasm for the story is infectious as he tells us why he chose it as his second feature film, *"For me, it's because it was so different to the usual stuff that comes across my desk. It's a character story about a broken family, and then you've got the sci-fi element on top of that, and then we go into the horror territory as well."*

There's certainly an influence of classic genre tales at play here, and Johnny is honest, *"I'm a big '80s horror/sci-fi fan so films like The Thing and Alien, where it's an ensemble piece with people's nerves jangled."* He goes on to explain how that scenario relates to this film, *"You have the first incident in the film, and you think 'where did this come from?' It's so sudden. It just continues from there; things escalate far worse than you could ever imagine. I thought that was just brilliant. You just don't know what has sealed them inside the house."*

Writer Gavin Williams explained to us how the idea for the story came to him, *"I actually know almost to the half hour when I got the idea. It was New Year's Eve, travelling home 2007/8 with my then girlfriend, listening to an album - Boxer by The National - I'd bought her for Christmas. There's a track on it called Apartment Story. A lyric set off the idea - something like 'Stay indoors until somebody finds you. Do whatever the TV tells you' and my little writer brain lit up with a spark. If you're a screenwriter and want films to be made, you have to find ways to contain them or do them in a manageable way. I instantly had this idea about people who are trapped, and just have this little window of information that they're being given in the form of instructions through a TV."* The story also



has parallels to the way people rely on the television and Internet to form opinions and access information, as Gavin explains, *"It's that power that the media has; nebulous authority. Society's so complex now. 'Experts' have differing opinions - who do you believe?"* This translates with the movie and how the characters react, *"It's very much a story about authority on all sorts of levels, and the media and control and those sorts of things. Right at the start, I knew it was a horror and dark science fiction idea and had to be about a family, levels of authority and these relationships."*

And it's this family dynamic that will cause a lot of the turmoil in the early stages of the film, and make the latter part even more difficult, as Grant Masters, who plays the father, explains, *"Tony is damaged right from the start. You find out in the first act why he's like that. He's got a very uncomfortable and disturbing childhood history. His past has caught up with him emotionally, and these events take place and force them to come up."* The inter-family squabbles make the situation worse, *"There's a lot of social*

power plays taking place throughout. They can't get out of the house; it's sealed up. It's like a pressure cooker, they're in there, there's nothing you can do, and you're just going to have to take it."

The key reason Grant's character Tony is so messed up is having to grow up in the shadow of his father, played by David Bradley. The highly respected actor gave us an insight into his role, *"He's the grandfather of this dysfunctional family, and he's quite unforgiving, he doesn't empathise with anyone else. He's got a damaged son, who he's ridiculed since day one. He calls him squelcher, probably because the kid wet the bed when he was ill, and got the hell beat out of him by Dad. It reminds me of that Philip Larkin poem: 'They fuck you up, your mum and dad, they may not mean to, but they do. They fill you with the faults they had, and add some extra, just for you.' I think the grandfather's behaved like this towards his own children because that's what he suffered."* Hearing the instantly recognisable voice of the actor recite the poem is a 'hairs on the back of the neck' moment and makes us all the more excited for seeing the final



L to R: Abigail Cuttenden, Neeja Naik, Grant Masters, Kris Saddler, Holly Weston, Sam Gittins

FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS



film. David continues, "The fact that in his career he was a military policeman, it says a lot that he chose a profession that was very much about control. And that's how he sees himself - if you don't keep kids down, they'll get one over on you - or anybody for that matter. So he's got this harsh view of the world. That's his way of staying on top of things. By having the power and control over his family."

David clearly has a handle on the character as he tells us, "He can sense that his turn is coming as he gets older and older, he'll start to lose his physical powers. I suspect he was quite a streetfighter in his day, physical, and that's what interests me rather than someone saying 'oh he's a bad bugger, he's evil' because that's making a judgement. As soon as you start making a judgement about a character, it becomes one dimensional, that's all it becomes about. If you think about why they do what they do, what they want, then you see a more human side. Everybody's like that; we're all capable of having an off day. But every day for Grandad seems to be an off day! He can be quite ruthless; I suspect it comes from a deeply rooted fear of being overpowered or being outwitted."

One of the early conflicts in the film revolves around the son Nick's girlfriend, Annji. A quick-witted paramedic, she is the voice of reason, even though that in itself causes more conflict within the family. Played by Neeja Naik, Annji is very much the audience's 'in' to the situation, "She's definitely a fish out of water. There are points at which things get so bad, she lets go of that to try to be accepted, but she's never disrespectful in any way. She's still just trying to do the right thing by everybody; pretty much the whole way through, even when she doesn't agree with actions that certain characters are taking."

Grandad finds it hard to accept Annji, which makes him an almost villainous figure, as David explains, "He's not a well-educated man, he's racist, homophobic; but if you can find some kind of reason for these things, there's a chance you can make him more human, which is what people want to see."

However, there's something humorous about him, which is important to keep the



L to R: Gavin Williams, Annika Summerson, Johnny Kevorkian, Jack Tarling.





story grounded, as Gavin explains, "There is a lot of dark humour in the script that's intentional to give that balance against how monstrous and terrifying it can become. But it was really important; we're not a comedy by any means, but a certain sense of lightness." David agrees, "The director's allowing the occasional bits of grim humour to creep into the story. It's sort of tragi-comic in a sense. Take Grandad, he's monstrous, but some of the expressions he comes out with or the way he puts people down are kind of grim humour, and I like that. I like characters who've got some kind of comic energy, no matter how bad they are or what they do. I love stepping into his shoes, in more ways than one."

The climax of the movie promises to be a spectacular explosion of visual effects in the vein of early David Cronenberg, and

everyone involved was glad to hear that as far as possible, physical props and prosthetics would be used, with just the occasional digital enhancement. Johnny teases us, "We have a massive amount of VFX, lots of things that go on in the end that will just be 'wow'. There's a hell of a lot of practical effects, which is great; lots of physical elements to it. We have a lot of animatronics." It's something Gavin appreciates as a writer, "With practical effects, it all comes back to truth, for an actor to have something there in the world, treat it like a real event is so important. You can see it in the performance. It is more of a challenge to do things practically, but it's absolutely the right thing to do because an audience feels that engagement, you just can't fake that. Computer effects can do amazing things, but if there's nothing there,

the connection isn't there."

Actor Sam Gittens, who plays Nick, is equally enthused by the thought of filming the climax, "When you get to the special effects, it's like a whole different thing. It's more like playtime! You get to see some very talented people do some beautiful stuff." Neeja teases the finale even more, "Johnny showed us the stuff we'd got, and it was amazing."

Our appetites well and truly whetted, we hoped to get a sneaky look at what they had planned, but like all professionals, they were tight-lipped and kept spoilers out of our way. Which, to be fair, is just how it should be. We're excited about this film and can't wait to see it on a big screen.

AWAIT FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS is expected to be released early 2017.





ACROSS THE WORLD

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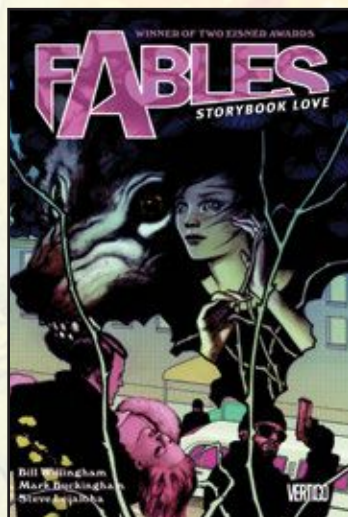
24 HRS A DAY

Messed Up FAIRY TALES

by Ed Fortune

THE HUNTSMAN: WINTER'S WAR follows the trend of taking a fairy tale and remixing it into something unique, different and strange. Rewriting old stories is something that storytellers have been doing for a very long time, and reimagining written works of fiction is something Hollywood loves doing. With all that in mind, let's take a look at some great books and comics that are ripe for such adaptations...

Arguably, *Fables* has already been turned into a live-action version; the premise bears more than a passing resemblance to hit US TV show *Once Upon a Time*, though it's apparently a coincidence. The set-up is sort of similar: all the fairy tale characters have moved from their storybook homeland to the real world. Specifically, Fabletown. Snow White is the mayor, the Big Bad Wolf is the sheriff (in human form); the first



book begins with an investigation into the murder of Rose Red, with Jack, of beanstalk fame, as a prime suspect. Writer Bill Willingham used the graphic novel format to its full potential, twisting the reader's mind throughout. After twenty-two editions, numerous spin-offs, and a popular video game, *Fables* came to a conclusion last summer.

Neil Gaiman's epic comic book story about the Lord of Dreams, known as *The Sandman*, isn't just about fairy tales; it's about storytelling and the nature of human imagination. When DC Comics first launched the book in the '80s, all they were expecting was a novel take on an old superhero. Gaiman delivered something much more than that: a reworking of mythic tropes that helped bring commercial comic books out of people's basements and in to the public domain. *The Sandman* follows the trials and tribulations of Dream, the god-like embodiment of imagination. His siblings include Death, Destiny, and Desire; the family gatherings are naturally difficult. Gaiman uses pretty much every fairy tale trope throughout the book, usually as a way of lulling the reader into a

false sense of security. The series ran for ten rather weighty graphic novels, so turning them into a movie has always been seen as a bit of a challenge. Gaiman has expressed that he'd 'rather see no *Sandman* movie made than a bad *Sandman* movie'.

That hasn't stopped Warner Bros from giving it a try, and both David S. Goyer and until recently Joseph Gordon-Levitt have been attached to the movie adaptation, although time will tell if it ever goes anywhere.

Sarah Pinborough's *Tales from the Kingdoms* is also worth a mention. Pinborough is hot property right now; the author's recent books have received praise and awards from pretty much every angle, and it's looking highly likely that her current work will hit the big screen sometime soon. *13 Minutes* and *The Death House* (both tales about teenage identity and murder) lend themselves well to a Hollywood-style thriller. However, she's also written fairy tales, though in her own unique style. The three *Tales from the Kingdoms* books (*Poison*, *Charm*, and *Beauty*) all possess a dark and twisted take

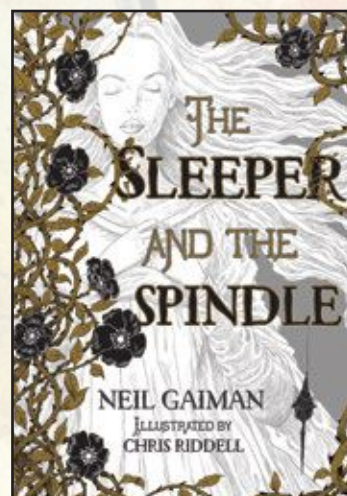




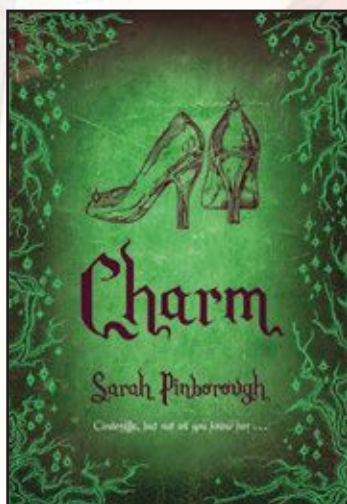
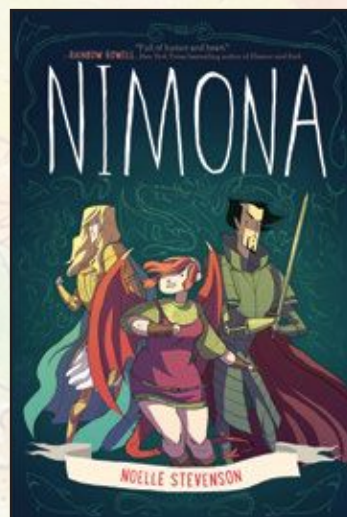
Marissa Meyer's *The Lunar Chronicles* is a Young Adult take on our shared stories that takes the whole thing into the future and out in to space. Cinderella is a cyborg called Cinder, and rather than an extravagant ball, her brilliance is revealed via a convoluted plot involving a plague and genetic testing. Little Red Riding Hood is a farm girl turned street savvy hunter, and Rapunzel becomes a kick-ass computer hacker with some severe security concerns. Meyer has been steadily expanding the world with each new book, and promises to continue feeding her fans with futuristic fairy stories. Speculation for a movie has pretty much become a regular meme on websites like Tumblr, but if it does hit the big screen, expect it to be big, fantastic and daft.



Another Neil Gaiman story, *The Sleeper and The Spindle* has a much more intense focus. Gaiman teamed up with Chris Riddell to

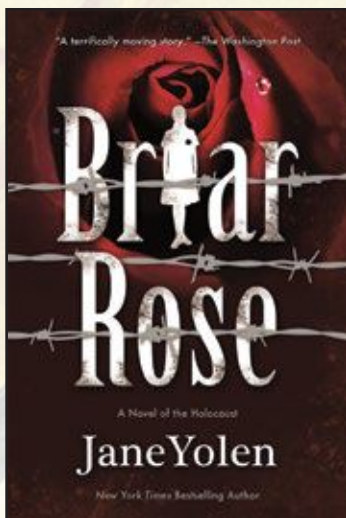


produce a rather lovely take on both Snow White and Sleeping Beauty. This lavishly illustrated tale works because it combines Gaiman's compelling prose with Riddell's incredible skill for line art. It's the story of a queen (one with red lips and pale skin) who heads off to rescue a princess, because why not? Adult in theme though child-like in its approach to joy, if they ever did make this into a film, we'd want to see it animated in the style of Riddell, and made into something as fun as the original. Noelle Stevenson's *Nimona* started out as a web comic and quickly shot Noelle to fame, thanks to its thick storytelling and lovely art. In this exquisite mix of science fiction and fantasy, we explore the world of Nimona, a mysterious urchin with shape-shifting powers. She teams up with the supervillain Lord Ballister Blackheart, a knight turned mad scientist. Pursued by the handsome Sir Ambrosius

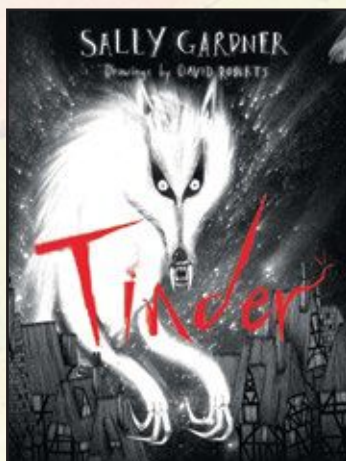


on the traditional princess story. Pinborough paints a world in which magic is feared and where wicked witches don't really need spells to twist a man to their will. Wonder and strangeness tends to be vicious and visceral, making a refreshing change of pace from those exposed to too much Disney. Sexy, violent and utterly compelling, it's unlikely these books will get turned into anything anytime soon, though it's the sort of thing that HBO would do quite well.

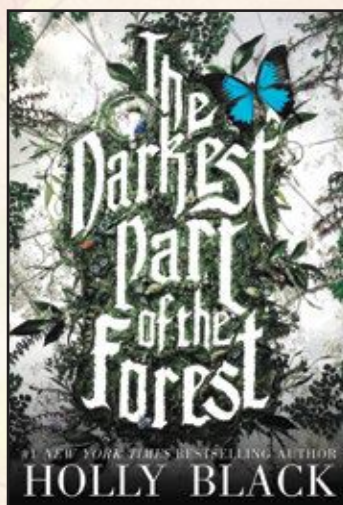
Goldenloin, we learn all about the nature of true love and bravery. Proper fairy tale stuff. Fox currently has the rights for the animation, but it would be a bit of a shame if this turned into a *Shrek*-style CG fest, as the original book is famous for its unique and striking art style.



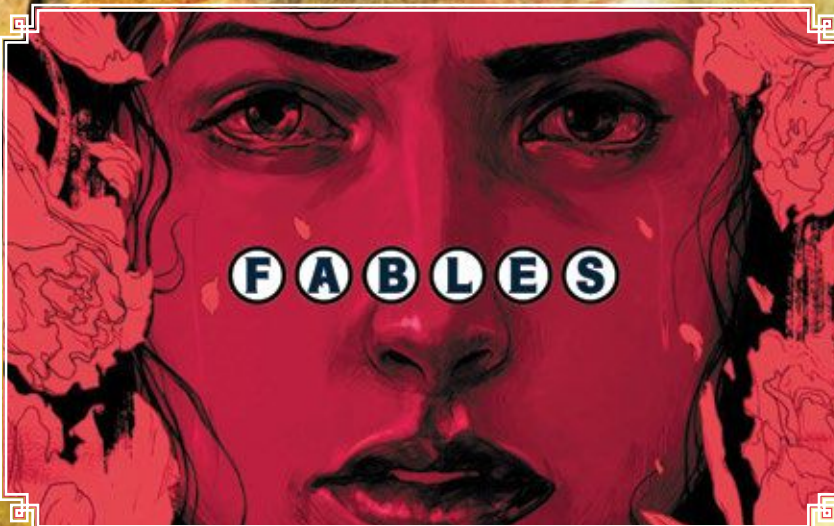
We could hardly talk about modern retellings of fairy tales without bringing up 1992's *Briar Rose*, by Jane Yolen. This award-winning (and heavy) novel turns the Sleeping Beauty story into a tale about World War II heroism and survival. When young Becca Berlin begins to dig deeply into her grandmother's bedtime stories, she discovers that the old lady led a terrible yet terrific life during the war. The book deals with very mature themes such as the holocaust and survivor syndrome. It would be interesting to see how Hollywood would rewrite such a powerful story, though Kirsten Dunst is a fan, so you never know.



Sally Gardner's *Tinder* (not to be confused with the app apparently popular amongst young people) is a reworking of Hans Christian Andersen's classic *The Tinderbox*. Set during the Thirty Years War and inspired by recent real world conflicts, it's a story of witches, death, military life, and, of course, wolves. Armed with only some old shoes and a set of dice, weary soldier Otto Hundediss stumbles upon a series of unlikely adventures that takes him into the heart of magic. It's a clever little retelling filled with shapeshifters, crones and fun.



We could hardly finish a list like this without mentioning the works of Holly Black. Her work on *The Spiderwick Chronicles* is filled with fairies and their stories. Of special note, though, is a non-Spiderwick book, *The Darkest Part of The Forest*. It's



an entirely different sort of story, one of looming adulthood and that terror unique to small towns, the notion that one is never going to escape the legacy of their parents. Set in Fairfold, this modern American town has a deadly twist. Whereas some small American towns have large balls of twine or hat museums to attract tourists, Fairfold has a genuine incursion from the land of Fairy going on. In the middle of the forest is a glass coffin, and a young man, fair of face with tiny horns, lies sleeping and has done so for a very long time. The locals scorn the tourists, who come to see the coffin, gawk, take photos, and then occasionally wander off into the forest never to be seen again.

The book focuses on the story of Hazel and Ben. Hazel regards herself as more than savvy in the ways of the fairy and always carries some cold iron. Things get worse when the boy in the glass coffin suddenly vanishes. This one has a lot of cinematic potential, and in parts it's clearly written with that in mind, though given the mediocre performance of the movie *Horns* (which it only has a superficial resemblance to), we may have a long wait.

There are of course, many, many more works inspired by classic fairy stories, so if you think we've missed anything, write to our letters page, we'd love to hear from you.

THE HUNTSMAN: WINTER'S WAR - the sequel to *SNOW WHITE AND THE HUNTSMAN* - hits UK cinemas on April 22nd.

HORROR
Obscura

This month, the multifaceted Martin Unsworth looks back at a low budget British classic with the help of one of the stars...

CRADLE OF FEAR





Several months ago, we spoke to British auteur Alex Chandon about his most recent film *Inbred* [see STARBURST #417], so we thought it would be a good time to cast an eye over his previous movie *Cradle of Fear*; a throwback in format to the Amicus portmanteau style, the film was a gloriously wild and gory ride, and starred two icons of modern British horror, Emily Booth and Eileen Daly. Both had worked with Chandon

before, on his 1997 film *Pervirella* and *Sacred Flesh* in 2000, and Eileen had already had an impact on the genre by starring in Jake West's *Razor Blade Smile* (1998) and being the 'face' of the Redemption video label; she has most recently been seen in the Big Brother house and on that horrendous 'talent' show *The X Factor*, rest assured she (singing with her partner Ben Thirkettle) were the only act worth watching. We spoke to Emily about

making the film, but before we get to that, let's find out what it's all about...

Chandon began shooting films on video; his early shorts *Chainsaw Scumfuck* (1988), *Bad Karma* (1991), and *Drillbit* (1992) were underground classics enjoyed by the many that purchased them from the man himself via adverts in horror magazines and fanzines. As the cost of making films was still fairly prohibitive, *Cradle of Fear* was also shot in this medium - albeit with higher-end equipment this time. Like the anthologies of old, there was a linking thread in *COF*, and this was provided by a character played by the frontman of extreme metal band Cradle of Filth. Dani Filth (born the less imposingly named Daniel Lloyd Davey) took the role of 'The Man' after working with Chandon on promotional videos for the group. His instantly evocative look provided the film with an iconic image right from the start. His reign of terror is conjured by a convicted child killer, Kemper (David McEwan), who controls 'The Man' from his padded cell in the secure prison Fenham Asylum.

Across the film, several grisly murders occur and it's down to Inspector Neilson (Edmund Dehn, who voiced Commander Ackbar in the 2006 *Star Wars* video game *Empire at War*, fact fans!) to work out the link and find the culprit. It's a fun linking story and allows the separate tales to play out naturally. Although as we actually know how they end, there's no 'twist' as there'd often be in the Amicus films.

Among the various vignettes, there's a harrowing variation on the 'limb with a mind of its own' trope, this time involving an unfortunate amputee who receives a leg from an unwilling donor. His girlfriend, played by Eileen Daly, comes off worse for it all though. There's some particularly icky gore in this segment, but it also boasts the *worst* computer-generated car crash effect ever seen. No disrespect to Alex and his crew, as this was clearly a low budgeted film, and the director himself has admitted that he has taught himself VFX, but it's still unintentionally hilarious.

A pair of young women break into a flat in one story, looking through all the possessions for something to steal. Little do they realise that the owner is in, sleeping silently under his covers. It's a predictable but fun diversion, which does feature some truly suspenseful and shocking moments during the segment's short and sweet running time. If the spindly frame of the old man whose belongings are being nicked looks familiar, it might be because Al Stokes played the thin man in Chris Cunningham's disturbing music video for Aphex Twin's *Come to Daddy* (his face replaced, of course, by Mr Aphex, Richard D. James).

The final episode involves a subject used by other films later on: Internet 'snuff' rooms. Stuart Laing plays Richard, whose job involves monitoring various dodgy websites. His fascination takes *Videodrome*-style turns when he finds one, The Sick Room, which allows people to pay for particularly nasty and violent things to happen to strangers. Like in the aforementioned Cronenberg film, Richard becomes obsessed with the visceral rush he gets from paying to see people abused and mutilated on his PC. It costs him his job, naturally as it goes beyond his remit. Like a junkie, he is compelled to spend more and more on the site, as he becomes addicted to the increasingly appalling scenes that play out in front of him. He eventually is tipped off about the location of the 'action', but is it the conclusion he really wants?

Emily Booth, who as well as being an actor and writer is the face and voice of the UK's Horror Channel, plays the victim in the first story, and we managed to speak to her about the role and the film, and get her recollections. Apparently, her co-star, the aforementioned Mr Filth, wasn't the person most people would imagine; *"He was actually pretty quiet and reserved on set! Like a lot of performers really - an extreme, nasty or crazy side is just part of an alter ego but not how you behave in real life! I only did a couple of days with him though and he was very sweet and gentlemanly!"*

In Emily's segment, she plays Mel, a young woman who is having a good time in a club, when she spots 'The Man' (Filth) who seduces her with his steely glare, and the pair share a steamy, passionate evening together. However, when she awakes, she feels different; disorientated and unnerved, she stumbles on to the streets of Soho. A scene that was filmed very much 'on the fly', as Emily tells us, *"I really enjoyed doing that scene because it was filmed guerrilla style and I was largely completely on my own on busy Oxford Street looking like a demented messed up Goth getting freaked out by looking at poor innocent passers-by! I enjoyed that as it made it feel that more real. I genuinely enjoy making other people alarmed!"*

The panicked and deranged look Emily sports in the film may not have been too distant to how she felt as she was also shooting the popular TV video game series *BITS* in Glasgow at the same time, *"I do remember because I was working so much and in London/ Glasgow with crazy filming hours I was at the time suffering a lot with insomnia so many of the scenes, I felt, had a bit of an edge because I genuinely felt a bit messed up at the time!"*

In the days following her night of passion with 'The Man', Mel begins

having hallucinations in the street, images of demons passing by, and a young girl approaches her to tell her that she's been told Mel's going to have her little brother. It's quite clear our evil antagonist has knocked poor Mel up, but with what? When she goes to see her friend, she's in for an even worse shock as she feels something moving inside her. It's a graphic and painfully realistic scene, and one that showcases the ingenious effects

work that Chandon manages on such a modest budget (which makes us forgive the shortcomings of some of the later CG effects). As *something* makes its way out of Mel's stomach, she takes matters into her own hands, and ends up in the state we first see when the police inspector and forensic boys are examining her.

More recently, Emily has become a mother for real, and one would





imagine doing scenes like these would have affected her, but not so, as she explained, in fact quite the opposite "I remember though when I shot both that scene, and the alien impregnation in *Evil Aliens* where my baby explodes from my stomach, - I've had two roles with alien/demons bursting through my stomach! - I felt a strange sense of twisted protectiveness! So even though there was something grotesque inside me, because it was mine, I felt a strange

maternity towards it!"

COF doesn't pull punches with the visuals, be that with the nudity, gore, or more shockingly, animal cruelty. Although plainly fake, at one point 'The Man' guts a fluffy cat, it's something that puts some viewers off, which Emily appreciates, "I understand it. Of course, it was fake although there were abhorrent films such as 'Cannibal Holocaust' (obviously, it doesn't

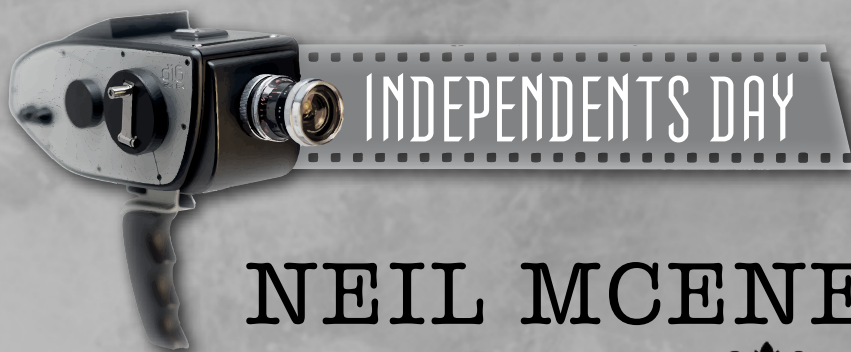
happen now!) in which animals were killed for real for the sake of movie entertainment which is so disgusting, that basically makes it snuff. Animals don't have a choice or a voice and are helpless and totally in our hands which makes it sick. They do not exist on the planet to be 'at our disposal'. But I suppose in a film such as this it adds to the extreme nature of it. I hated the scene in 'Kids' where they beat a cat strung up. Very grim."

With decapitations and all manner of disembowelling going on - not to mention a chisel-to-the-teeth moment that out-does *The Last House on the Left* (1972) - it's not surprising that the gore in *COF* was so over the top that Chandon had the original VHS copies of the film distributed from Europe in order to bypass the BBFC, whom he assumed would butcher the film much in the same way 'The Man' does the victims on screen. That wasn't the case, however, and the film was released uncut on July 4th, 2001. The effects budget was stretched to its limit, with the ingenious director getting very hands-on as usual in all aspects of the production. For every effect that doesn't quite make the mark, there's a dozen that are sickeningly realistic. Emily recalls her time covered in viscera: "I was getting absolutely covered in entrails, fake blood and latex skin flaps! They did actually use real organic tissue where possible, so some of my stomach that has exploded after the birth of my demon baby is actually bits of chicken skin, sliced ham and then mixed in with stringy noodles to create the gut. Nice. I was full-on vegetarian at the time, too. One of the main things I remember when I was lying on the bed in Alex's mum's house (for my death scene) was Alex saying 'more blood, we need more blood!' Her walls got annihilated with fake blood, but she was so cool, took it all in her stride and had a homemade casserole ready for us for lunch."

There's a chance to catch *Cradle of Fear* as it screens on Horror Channel, but we'll leave the final word to Emily Booth as we asked her about her favourite portmanteau film, "From my recollection 'Asylum' - which we show regularly on Horror Channel - is one of the most creepy and has a great setting - you should definitely check it out; Peter Cushing, Charlotte Rampling, Britt Ekland - a classic!" We whole heartedly agree, but for a modern twist on the idea, you could do much worse than having a fun night in with *Cradle of Fear*.



CRADLE OF FEAR screens on Horror Channel on April 8th. Tune in on Sky 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138.



by Paul Mount

NEIL MCENERY-WEST

NEIL MCENERY-WEST is the latest in a talented line of new young directors creating powerful, original UK genre movies on tiny budgets that are often able to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Hollywood's brasher, more generously funded efforts. **STARBURST** spoke to him about his **début** **CONTAINMENT** and making movies...

STARBURST: How did you become involved in filmmaking and how did *Containment* come about? Neil Mcenery-West: I've been making short films for several years - since my late teens, in the late nineties. I went to university, worked in TV for a little while and it was actually in about 2003 that I started working on a short film, and that kind of led to *Containment*. It was called *Undertow* and it took five or six years to make and it was always designed as a calling card, to hopefully be enough to convince someone to back a bigger project. It was quite similar in style but much more art-house than *Containment*, but it was a similar notion in that it was a slightly dystopian vision, very character-based so it was a natural lead-on in some respects. *Containment* was in development for a while, it took us quite a while to get it to a place where we were all really happy with it.



CONTAINMENT



How would you describe *Containment*? It seems to be part horror, part zombie movie, part psychological thriller...

It's a bit of a melting pot, but I'd say it's a psychological thriller predominantly. That's certainly how we talk about it; but I always felt like it was a horror film as well and stylistically, that's the way I approached it. It's probably a cross between those two genres more than anything.

The film's extraordinarily tense, brutal, and uncompromising, but in the end, it seems to be about people and the choices they sometimes have to make...

In some ways that's really the crux of the story, the notion that there aren't good or bad people, there's just people, and the horror comes from the choices that they make and the effect those choices have. As people, we all have very primal instincts, but in order to function in society, it's more comfortable for us to imagine ourselves as purely civilised and I think that's what's scary about this story. We're dealing with ordinary people you can identify with making horrific choices and becoming people they wouldn't really want to become, and I think that's far more terrifying because it's more rooted in reality than anything fantastical. It's that innate primal instinct in all of us that needs an extreme scenario to trigger it and for it to come out. It was great fun to play with the notion that the hazmats are set up in the

beginning as the villains and you expect them to be the villains, but really they're in the same situation and it's quite horrific that all the events of the film come out of a misunderstanding. The hazmats try not to say anything in order to not panic the residents, but that actually has the reverse effect; the residents retaliate and it becomes this sort of urban jungle and complete chaos. There aren't any good or bad people, it's just everyone against everyone because everyone is trying to survive. It's that notion that it could happen almost out of nowhere.

Does the film reflect your own genre interests?

I usually seek out thrillers with a tinge of horror; that's the area I'm probably most interested in. I'm a huge fan of Stanley Kubrick and early Scorsese and really most of the filmmakers from the '70s and '80s. A lot of the American independents, but at the same time it's a weird mishmash because I really like 1960s European movies, I'm really into people like Antonioni, Truffaut, Godard and the like. But in terms of *Containment*, John Carpenter was a huge influence – *The Thing*, in particular, was a reference point for my co-writer David Lemon and I; that sense of a contained space and that mistrust between the characters where no-one's quite sure who to side with.

How did you come to work with David

Lemon and how much of the process which led to the script was collaborative?

I met David through Christine Hartland, who was the first producer on board with the film. She recommended him, so we met up and hit it off straight away and it went from there really. He'd made *Faintheart*, which was more of a comedy, and I think he was looking to do something that was more in this genre, because it was an area he was really interested in as well. The original premise of the story was very simple. David and I worked very closely in developing the story together. We'd just meet up a lot and spit-ball ideas then he'd frame them into an outline and then we'd meet up again, take them all apart and say '*Why don't we do this here and this here*' so that part was very collaborative. David was the sole writer, so once we'd locked the story down, he'd go away and write the script and then we'd meet up and I'd have some notes to go through on things I thought were working well or not so well and we'd talk about it and then he'd go away again and rewrite. It was a really nice process, he's such fun to work with and even though it took a few years, it was an enjoyable experience.

For a first-time director you've managed to land an impressive cast for the movie with the likes of Lee (The Catherine Tate Show, EastEnders) Ross, Sheila



(Benidorm, Doctor Who) Reid, and Louise (Sherlock) Brealey in the main roles. How involved were you with the casting?

We had two really amazing casting directors – Lucy Jenkins and Sooki McShane – who made a lot of the recommendations for actors who ended up in the film and, to be perfectly honest, although I had some initial thoughts, I was fairly blind going in. I wasn't sure who we should have in this. We had a couple of ideas for the leading character but apart from that, it was quite vague; Lucy and Sooki were great at guiding us. They put Lee's name forward for the 'leading man' role of Mark and they really pushed for Andrew Leung (hot-head resident Sergei) and he's great because when you meet him, he's the nicest person in the world, he's so gentle and he came in and recorded a take for us and it was such a transformation. I wasn't 100% sure at first but watching it again and talking to Lucy and Sooki, I was totally convinced that he was the best choice for the part. It was much the same with a lot of the others. Gabriel Senior who plays the boy Nicu was actually a recommendation from our line producer Sarah Senior, who'd worked with him before, and again he was an amazing find, a complete natural. He's a complete professional and the nicest, most patient kid you could imagine because he's older than he looks on screen; he was fourteen when we shot

the film, so he was playing younger. We were lucky, it was a great cast, they were all really good, which was so important for this film because it's such a character-driven piece.

Was there time, in a tight shoot, for the cast to have any input into their characters or the script?

There was time for input, but it was more in the preproduction and rehearsal period. Sadly, it's always the way with films, you get hardly any rehearsal time; we got one full day of rehearsal before the film but I did manage to meet up with each of the actors individually, at least once if not a couple of times, and a lot of the work on the characters was done in that period one-to-one. We would sit down and there were different exercises I wanted to run through with them to embellish some of the subplots of the character and bring out who they were and their background. We did as much as we could, because we knew that as soon as we got on set, we'd have to hit the ground running. It was a three-week shoot with an ensemble cast, it was just insanely quick! But they were really good, they were accommodating and they were happy to meet up and talk about it.

How did you, as an untested first-time director, manage to get such an ambitious film financed?

We found this genuinely amazing investor by the name of Simon Sole and his production company Bandoola Productions – this is the first feature he was putting money into – and I think it was Christine who found him. When he came on board, which was quite towards the end of development, it all happened very quickly. The amazing thing about Simon was that he was very hands-on, incredibly supportive and he really went out of his way both in pre-production and during production – whenever you saw him he was always coming up and saying 'Have you got everything you need, are you sure you're okay?' He was the kind of guy you could approach and be very honest with and say 'Look, we're running a little bit behind, we're gonna need a bit of help financially with this' or 'I'm gonna need a bit more time with that' and he was great; he didn't get involved creatively aside from just wanting to know what was going on in the process. He's quite a savvy businessman. I think we were a lot luckier than I'm sure a lot of first-time filmmakers are because we had the benefit of private finance, which gave us a bit more creative freedom than we might have had in other situations. But also, we didn't have someone who was trying to shoehorn their niece or nephew into one of the main roles or wanted to make edits on the final cut, so that was a really good experience. He made it



clear that he was very people-oriented. He spent a lot of time getting to know all of the principal people involved - myself, Casey, Pete, Christine, the three producers - because he likes to invest in people he can trust and that he thinks are good at their jobs and then he's happy to let them run with things.

You've mentioned how important your three producers were to the project. How did they become involved with *Containment*?

Pete and Casey run a production company called Bright Cold Day and they're film graduates. Christine knew Casey before we went into production. Christine set up a meeting with me and Casey in 2009, and that was because she thought Casey might be interested in becoming a line producer on the film, obviously focusing on the financing and the day-to-day stuff, and she was interested but she was going off to study in the National School of Film and Television, but bizarrely by the time she graduated we were still in development and that's when she came back to us and set up this production company with Pete Smyth, Christine just set up a meeting between the four of us; and Pete and Casey came on board as the main day-to-day producers and between the three of them, the film got made.

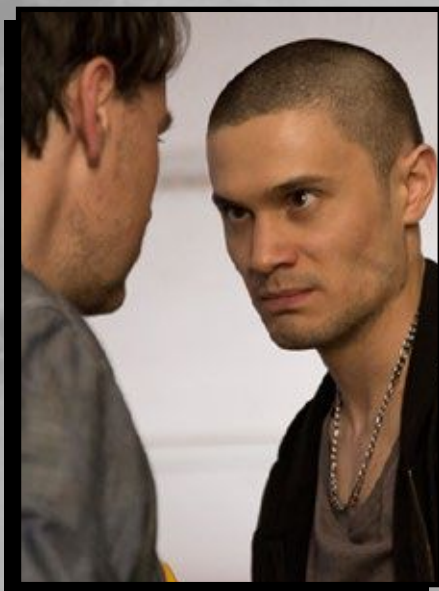
What's your opinion of crowd-funding as a way of financing film projects?

I think they're a great idea to be honest. If we hadn't been lucky enough to get the finance we did then that's certainly one of the options we'd have looked into. Regardless of where you get the finance from, whether you're crowd-funding or going to a private investor or an Arts Council, the onus is always on you as the creative to really have a product, a story, an idea that will grab people. There are different restraints depending on where you go, but it always comes down to the same thing really, which in this case is have you got a good story and will people want to see it? I think if you want to go crowd-funding and people are happy to invest in it because it's something they'd like to see, then that's great. The more options there are, the better, because it's so hard to get funding. I'm certainly under no illusions that we were incredibly fortunate. One of the big advantages I had is that Casey, Pete and Christine, my three producers, were very good at their job and they were brilliant at finding finance and also knowing who to go to and the right sort of favours to call. The story originated with an idea I had which I started working on with Christine and David, but really without the three producers we wouldn't have made the film, because it's really hard traversing the whole film finance ocean, it's just an absolute nightmare.



CONTAINMENT is available now on DVD and will premiere on Horror Channel in the UK on April 15th. Sky 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138.





CONTAINMENT

**CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: NEIL MCENERY-WEST /
SCREENPLAY: DAVID LEMON / STARRING: LEE ROSS,
SHEILA REID, GABRIEL SENIOR, ANDREW LEUNG /
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

Mark (Ross) is a struggling artist, separated from his wife and child and living in a grotty tower block. He wakes one morning to find that there's no electricity or water supply and, more alarmingly, he's been hermetically sealed inside his flat. A voice on the intercom advises him that 'the situation is under control' while in the grounds outside a military tent has been set up. Mysterious figures in orange hazmat suits are on the prowl and appear to be removing the inhabitants of the neighbouring block by force.

Containment is another of those glorious unexpected triumphs that the British film industry is still able to pull out of its hat every now and again. Vaguely reminiscent of previous tower block thrillers such as... um... Tower Block and Comedown, this debut feature from Neil Mcenery-West is practically a textbook example of how to create a tense, claustrophobic, edgy, trust-no-one modern urban thriller.

Survivalist films are nothing new, of course, and on paper the whole premise of Containment has an undeniable whiff of seen-all-this-before. But Mcenery-West's deft handling of the bleak, drab location (much of the film is set in the block itself with some atmospheric outside filming in the last act) and his small cast of core characters, powered by Lemon's lean no-nonsense script, puts a brave new spin on an initially familiar and derivative story. Mark is quickly joined by a small and disparate group of neighbours and together (and sometimes not together) they struggle to make sense of their situation, and to find a way to stay alive.

The 'reveal' of exactly what's going on might not be a huge surprise, yet the film's pace never slackens and even when it drifts perilously close to zombie movie territory at points – the rampaging, enraged neighbours escaped from the adjacent block determined to get their hands on the hazmat guard that Mark and his group have captured – it still manages to feel fresh, vibrant and original. Characterisation is sharp, despite (or more probably because of) the film's taut 75-minute running time. The cast – Lee Ross (EastEnders, The Catherine Tate Show) and Sheila Reid (Benidorm, Doctor Who) being the best known names – are utterly convincing in their portrayal of terrified, bewildered and yet doggedly determined ordinary folk who find themselves in an extraordinary and desperate situation.

It's hard to find significant fault with Containment, so we won't even try. Stark, brittle, disquieting and with an ending to rival The Mist for bleakness, Containment is British genre cinema to champion and one to shout about from the nearest rooftop. Just maybe not a tower block...



REVIEWS

THE LATEST BIG
SCREEN GENRE
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED



THE WITCH

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: ROBERT EGGERS / STARRING: ANNA TAYLOR-JOY, RALPH INESON, KATE DICKIE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

"What went we out into this wilderness to find", says patriarch Will at the beginning of Robert Eggers' spine-chilling debut feature *The Witch*. Anyone still smarting almost 20 years later over the complete lack of any witch sightings in *The Blair Witch Project* can rest assured that *The Witch* is not nearly as coy about revealing its scary woman in the woods. It may be a slow burner, but it builds to a crescendo that might very well give many horror fans a little too much full frontal witchery at the expense of some far more interesting earlier ambiguity.

A strict Christian family are banished from their plantation in 17th century New England; William (Ralph Ineson), Katherine (Kate Dickie), their four children and brand new baby boy. Settling on the edge of a dark forest, their crops will not grow and hunting in the woods results in no meat. Then, baby Sam mysteriously disappears without a trace while under the watch of oldest child Thomasin (Anya Taylor-Joy). Despair and desperation soon take hold of the family, leading to paranoia and a further descent into pious babbling. Eggers makes it clear that there is something wicked in the woods, but *The Witch* explores how innocent the family are themselves.

Beautifully created and lovingly crafted, *The Witch* is a transporting experience at its best. With Jacobean

language taken from period journals and other records and incredibly evocative production design, *The Witch* feels all too real, even as supernatural elements are introduced. With its actors speaking in Northern English accents and the largely domestic setting, *The Witch* is like a kitchen sink slice of Brit-grit realism, except instead of arguing around kitchen sinks, the family are at each others' throats while they milk goats.

The religious fervour of the time (it's set shortly before the Salem witch trials kicked-off and killing wise women

became a favourite pastime of the church) bleeds into every exchange of dialogue. Patriarch Will is unable to reassure his son Caleb of a place in heaven, while the ease with which he and his wife can turn on their own daughter is awfully believable. There is a constant atmosphere of dread; by day it's mostly the doom and gloom of sinful confessions and the fear of burning in hell and by night, Eggers really unleashes the fear.

Every creak of the trees, every sound of the wind or the goats outside can be amplified into utter terror. Eggers makes it clear that no one is safe from the get-go. And though he saves most of the revelation for the final scene, when we do get glimpses of the witch, or the possible voice of Lucifer himself, it's hard not to shriek. In its most tense moments, *The Witch* is wickedly frightening. Eggers constantly cuts on loud noises like axes chopping wood in order to never let you give your clenched buttocks a rest.

The leads are all excellent, from the creepy twin kids to the more challenging roles of Caleb and Thomasin, but best of all are Ralph Ineson and Kate Dickie as the parents of the clan. Committed and conflicted, they savour the opportunity to deliver Eggers' terrific ye olde English script.

The Witch is expertly directed with a hysterical score, beautiful production design and wicked performances from its central cast. Truly spine-chilling when at its most ambiguous, it only stumbles slightly in its final scene.

PETE TURNER

EXPECTED ★★★★★★★★ 9

ACTUAL ★★★★★★★★ 8



STARBURST



HIGH-RISE

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: BEN WHEATLEY / SCREENPLAY: AMY JUMP / STARRING: TOM HIDDLESTON, SIENNA MILLER, JEREMY IRONS, LUKE EVANS / RELEASE DATE: MARCH 18TH

Ben Wheatley continues to make a name for himself with an increased budget in this adaptation of J.G. Ballard's cult novel *High-Rise*.

Dr Robert Laing (Tom Hiddleston) moves into the *High-Rise*, a vast apartment block that has everything that its occupants could need. As the tower rises, the economic status of its residents does the same. As intermittent power failures and other problems start to affect the building, the social

order starts to turn to chaos.

High-Rise has aspects of Wheatley's previous work in its DNA; the violence and gore of *Kill List*, the dark humour of *Sightseers*, and the kaleidoscopic visuals and surrealism of *A Field in England*. However, the production is obviously a step up from his previous work, creating a technically more accomplished film. *High-Rise* is Wheatley's best looking film yet, whether it's Laing reflected over and over in

the opulent lift, a clear reference to the shot in *Citizen Kane*, or the juxtaposition between the lush green garden at the top of the building, with the bleak industrial landscape just outside of its walls. Amy Jump's script keeps *High-Rise* to the book's time zone of the mid-1970s. As such the technology of the film has a wonderfully analogue feel to it, contrasted to the large slabs of concrete that make up the building. The book's subject matter also remains prescient with the class system and inequality still an issue today.

Wheatley has also assembled a great cast. Hiddleston is magnetic as Laing and helps you get drawn into the film. Equally enjoyable is Luke Evans, as the increasingly erratic and hard-partying alpha male Richard Wilder, who must surely be considered a co-lead. Sienna Miller continues to happily surprise and turn up where you least expect and Elizabeth Moss tries her hand at an English accent, with mostly positive results.

As the high rise descends

into chaos and disorder, so, unfortunately, does the film. An entertaining and interesting build up in the first half leads to not a lot in the second. The film's initial work, in drawing you into a surreal and blackly comic world, ends up just leaving you with not much, as the film reveals that it doesn't really have anywhere to go or much else to do. As such, the second half starts to drag and the film pushes at its bloated two-hour running time, as it just piles up more debauchery and chaos on top of itself.

High-Rise is Wheatley's best film since *Kill List* but it is still beset with problems. It often looks great but an enjoyable first half gives way to a dull and dragging second half, due to the film's lack of focus and drive. There are things to admire and enjoy but *High-Rise* can't help but be a bit of a disappointment.

COURTNEY BUTTON

EXPECTED ++++++ 7

ACTUAL ++++++ 6



ZOOTROPOLIS

CERT: PG / DIRECTORS: BYRON HOWARD, RICH MOORE, JARED BUSH / SCREENPLAY: JARED BUSH, PHIL JOHNSTON / STARRING: GINNIFER GOODWIN, JASON BATEMAN, IDRIS ELBA, SHAKIRA, J.K. SIMMONS / RELEASE DATE: MARCH 25TH

It's a brave move to make a kids film with a montage of the do-gooder main character dishing out 200 parking tickets. *Zootropolis* could have done without this scene, but impressively it manages to make its leading bunny likeable, no matter how many other *Zootropolis*-dwelling animals' days she ruins by slapping them with a fine.

Judy Hops (Ginnifer Goodwin) is the bunny tasked with parking duty, after she works her fluffy little tail off to get out of her small town, get herself through police academy and finally live her

dream of tackling crime in the big city of *Zootropolis*. Judy is a dreamer, determined to leave her carrot-farming folks behind and be the first ever bunny police officer. But life in the city isn't quite how Judy imagined it would be, and she is forced to team up with streetwise hustler fox Nick Wilde (Jason Bateman) to unravel the mystery of some missing mammals.

Judy's journey from small-town girl with big dreams to city-hardened detective is packed with enthusiasm. She could be an annoyingly optimistic one-note character, if

she wasn't constantly being put down by others from her own well-meaning parents to her new boss, Chief Bojo (Idris Elba). Sly fox Nick Wilde makes a good foil, but it's yet another role where Jason Bateman doesn't get to show how good he can be.

The city itself is filled with potential, a wonderland of different climates and different sized sectors to cater for its wildly varied population. Judy and Nick's investigation takes them through Tundratown and into the territory of Godfather-riffing rodents, through tropical rainforests and swinging vines, to one chase through a mini-street filled with hamster tubes. If *Zootropolis* were an animal-populated Grand Theft Auto style video game, you could have a bloody field day.

It's a shame Shakira has to be crowbarred in as a dancing pop queen who warbles the same song on the soundtrack, not once but twice. It's as if Disney are concerned that they're not going to make enough money by selling merchandise with cute animals all over it already. But the animation is impressively cute, with Judy's emotions shining through particularly clearly, thanks to Goodwin's voice work, but also through the character design and

animated performance.

The central mystery that Judy is eventually given 48 hours to solve has a few too many twists and turns, and though it's got some neat surprises, it overstays its welcome and may well test a few kiddies' patience. *Zootropolis* is at its best when exploring the wonderfully realised world of the film, as well as with its jokes about rabbits and reproduction that litter the script. The *Breaking Bad* and *Frozen* references might make it date quickly, but a film with Shakira on the soundtrack clearly isn't too worried about that.

In tackling the differences between rural and urban life, civilisation and savagery, *Zootropolis* goes to some fairly dark places. While some of the more adult gags and references will go over children's heads, the message about the selling of fear through perpetuating negative stereotypes might just stick. A wild ride with some noir-ish undertones, *Zootropolis* packs in plenty to keep the whole family entertained.

PETE TURNER

EXPECTED ++++++ 5

ACTUAL ++++++ 6



PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR AND SCREENPLAY: BURR STEERS / STARRING: LILY JAMES, SAM RILEY, JACK HUSTON, BELLA HEATHCOTE, MATT SMITH, LENA HEADEY, CHARLES DANCE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In theory, the genre mash-up movie – two diametrically opposed storytelling styles flung together – has a lot going for it and has the potential to produce some refreshingly original and high octane cinematic experiences. The end results have so far ranged from the deadly dreary (Cowboys and Aliens) to the frustratingly underpowered (Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter). It's this latter category that *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (like Abraham Lincoln, based on a novel by Seth Grahame-Smith, with more than a nod to Jane Austen's 1813 classic) favours, its lavish production and unashamedly ripe performances failing to lift a film which is more likely, perhaps surprisingly, to appeal more to the Austen addict than the zombie zealot.

We're in the mannered country house world of the Bennets, Darcys, Bingleys, and Featherstones in an alternative early 19th century England caught in the grip of a terrible uprising of the dead. A Royal Canal, which divides the country, keeps the flesh-rendering, brain-eating zombies at bay and is accessible by one remaining bridge, heavily fortified. The five Bennet sisters are well trained in Shaolin martial arts (just in case) but their fussy mother (the brilliant Sally Phillips) is typically concerned with marrying them off to well-to-do gentlemen, in an era when young ladies stood to inherit none of their parents' wealth and substance and risked a life of penury. The dashing Mr Bingley (Booth) takes up residence at nearby Netherfield and Mrs Bennet is keen to pair the beautiful Elizabeth (James) up with the charming newcomer, even

though Elizabeth really isn't keen to find a partner at all. The dashing, if surly, Colonel Darcy (Riley) is also on the scene but his courting manners leave much to be desired and his comments at a swanky ball, intended to throw Bingley and Elizabeth together, leave Elizabeth in tears. Meanwhile, the clumsy, awkward Parson Collins (Smith in full-on bumbling Eleventh Doctor mode) is also looking for a wife and, frankly, any of the Bennet girls will do.

What, you might well be asking, has any of this got to with zombies? Not as much as you might expect, in all honesty. The zombie threat is rumbling away in the background, occasionally referenced, and we're told (and, in fairness, briefly shown) that London has fallen to the undead and the zombie hordes are creeping ever nearer the only remaining barrier between chaos and carnage and polite, civilised society and lovely teas. It all sounds utterly barking mad but the real problem for horror fans (and this really isn't a horror film by any means) is that there's much more *Pride and Prejudice* here than *Zombies*. Fans of Austen's classic of social mores will recognise much of Austen's very precise dialogue, even though it's now amusingly delivered during energetic fight sequences and training montages. But the script is much more respectful to Austen than it is to zombie lore and gorehounds might take umbrage at a film which features talking, running zombies, which only fully transform into the true undead when they first taste human brains. There are long, drawn-out sequences where there's not a

zombie in sight or indeed any real mention of a zombie, which isn't necessarily enormously troubling as the atmospheric antics of the Bennets, and their various would-be suitors, are beguiling enough even for an audience who wouldn't normally touch a bonnet with a bargepole. But this does mean the energy levels dip a bit and when the action kicks in, the film starts to spring back to life. It's undeniably hilarious and exciting seeing the Bennet sisters, all heaving bosoms and flashing thighs, whip out their blades and staves, and start wreaking (fairly bloodless) havoc amongst the rampaging zombie hordes but it just doesn't happen enough. The finale is frantic and furious but it's a bit too much too late for a film which, once again, has fumbled a potentially promising cinematic ball by not quite managing the difficult balancing act of keeping two genres spinning in the air at once.

Pride and Prejudice and Zombies is probably the best of the mash-up movies (and stick around for the amusing mid-credits sequence, which does tend to undermine the whole of the rest of the movie) – it's frequently very funny and almost always absolutely tongue-in-cheek – but it looks like we'll have to wait a bit longer for the movie which really gets the balance right in presenting a combination of classic drama and high-concept fantasy.

PAUL MOUNT

EXPECTED ★★★★★★★★ 7

ACTUAL ★★★★★★★★ 6



THE FOREST

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JASON ZADA / SCREENPLAY: NICK ANTOSCA, SARAH CORNWELL, BEN KETAI / STARRING: NATALIE DORMER, TAYLOR KINNEY, EOIN MACKEN, YUKIYOSHI OZAWA / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Modern horror movies tend to demand that their audiences are willing to make huge leaps of faith regarding the behaviour and motivations of their lead characters. Take *The Forest*, for example; Natalie Dormer's Sara Price receives a phone call from the Japanese Police informing her that her troubled teacher sister Jess is missing, presumed dead, having been seen entering the Aokigahara Forest at the foot of Mount Fuji. The forest - in reality as well as within the film's

fiction - is notorious as a final destination for the suicidal and is also reputedly haunted by the angry spirits (yurei) of those left to die. Sara, dutiful sister, jets 6,000 miles on what might seem to be an unlikely, fruitless, needle-in-a-haystack search to find her missing sister in the 14-square mile wilderness of the forest. At first, though, accompanied by a friendly guide and an intrigued journalist she chats up in a bar, it looks as though Sara's quest has drawn fruit with ease as in the

middle of the forest she stumbles upon a tent she recognises as belonging to her sister... but Jess is nowhere in sight.

The Forest wears its influences unashamedly on its sleeve. There's a bit of *Blair Witch* here, a touch of the Japanese ghost story and psychological horror yarn there; but it's a pleasantly exhilarating brew that rewards in ways we might not expect from a film that, superficially, appears pretty generic and formulaic. What really makes *The Forest* work - apart from a persuasive performance from Dormer as the steely Sara - is its location. Filming in Tokyo initially gives the movie the uncomfortable air of a travelogue but when the action switches to the forest (a substitute location in Serbia as filming isn't allowed in the real Aokigahara) the film switches gear and becomes edgy, claustrophobic and occasionally unsettling. Zada reveals in the opportunities afforded by the dense, stifling environment to really ratchet up the disorientating sense of unease and Sara's determination to find her sister becomes almost

obsessive as she plunges further into the forest. We're never sure if what she's seeing and experiencing is genuine or just hallucination conjured up by her eerie surroundings. But as friends appear to become enemies and Sara begins to lose control of her sense of what's right and what's real, it seems that ghosts and memories from her own past are in danger of overwhelming her just as it seems as if her search is coming to an end...

The Forest doesn't reinvent the horror movie but there are some decent creepy moments here and there and the obligatory something's-appeared-out-of-nowhere jump scares, which suggests that although the movie's hardly destined to figure on anyone's 'top ten horror movies' list, it's guaranteed to provide a few thrills and spills for the ninety-odd minutes you spend in its company in the multiplex.

PAUL MOUNT

EXPECTED ++++++ 5

ACTUAL ++++++ 6



THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JOHANNES ROBERTS / SCREENPLAY: JOHANNES ROBERTS, ERNEST RIERA / STARRING: SARAH WAYNE CALLIES, JEREMY SISTO, SOFIA ROSINSKY, SUCHITRA PILLAI-MALIK / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Grief can affect people in many different ways. Some may become withdrawn and depressed, others may resort to drink or drugs, some may pick themselves up and get on with their lives. In *The Other Side of the Door*, the latest film from Johannes Roberts, Maria (Callies) perhaps goes to extremes most of us might resist. When her young son drowns following a car accident, Maria is tempted by a resurrection ritual that gives her the opportunity to say a proper farewell to her son Oliver. All she has to do is scatter his ashes on the steps of a crumbling old temple near the family home in Mumbai and lock herself inside the temple as the deceased

returns to the corporeal world so she can communicate with him through the closed door. But opening the door before he finally 'passes' would be a Very Bad Thing indeed...and there are no prizes for guessing precisely what Maria does halfway through the ritual.

The Other Side of the Door is a well-crafted story that touches several familiar bases but perhaps what's most heartening is that it allows Roberts to work on a much broader canvas than any of his earlier, lower-budget movies. Here we're in India, and whilst it's perhaps unfortunate that there's only one speaking part for an Indian character, the film is suffused with the

culture and superstitions of its location. Roberts has plundered not only one of the lesser works of Stephen King (*Pet Sematary*) but also real-world Hindu spiritualism and Japanese horror cinema resulting in a film packed with familiar genre imagery, tied to a story etched with creeping menace and a genuine sense of dread.

The film is careful not to shoot its horror-bolt too soon. Once we've navigated the difficult credibility-straining hurdle of a grieving mother exhuming her dead son's ashes and randomly scattering them around a crumbling temple in the middle of nowhere, the film takes its time showing exactly what Maria's done by opening a door that should never be opened. Turns out that the spirit of her dead young son is back and he's bad ass... and Maria's opened the gateway to the Netherworld, through which unnamed nasties may be inclined to escape. Except the film doesn't actually go down that potentially-apocalyptic route, preferring a more intimate story in which the Gatekeeper has crossed over into our world to try and drag the dead lad's bitter spirit back to the Beyond. Maria is at first delighted when she realises that her son's

apparently-benign spirit is back but soon all the banging doors, flickering lights and peripheral phantom phenomena take on a more sinister aspect as Maria realises she's bitten off more than she can chew.

The Other Side of the Door throws a lot of mud at the wall and most of it sticks thanks to a powerful performance by former *Walking Dead* star Callies (although Jeremy Sisto is slightly wasted in an under-written role as her husband) and if we've a significant criticism it's that the careful character building and atmosphere of the first hour is cast aside in the last half-hour or so in favour of a volte face in the narrative which suddenly hurls demonic possession into the mix. But it's all slick, well-orchestrated stuff that hits the required beats time after time, even delivering an interesting, show-stopping ending.

The Other Side of the Door sees Johannes Roberts finally making his mark as a film director of some style; this is one door we'd advise you to step through as soon as possible.

PAUL MOUNT

EXPECTED ++++++ 6

ACTUAL ++++++ 8

REVIEWS

THE LATEST HOME
VIDEO RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



DOOMWATCH: THE REMAINING EPISODES

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTORS & SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: JOHN PAUL, SIMON OATES, ROBERT POWELL, JOBY BLANSHARD, JEAN TREND / RELEASE DATE: APRIL 4TH

Few TV series can lay claim to actually having popularised a word in the English language. Doctor Who may have ingratiated 'Dalek' into the Oxford English but in the early 1970s, the word 'doomwatch', to a British TV audience, at least, was irrevocably connected to this dramatic – sometimes wilfully melodramatic – series, created by Dr Kit Pedler and his co-writer Gerry Davis. The pair's concerns about the potential dangers of unchecked and unmonitored scientific development had already created the iconic Cybermen for Doctor Who a few years earlier; initially, the Cybermen were humanoids, who replaced their body parts to avoid disease and ageing, ending up as cold, emotionless and ruthless machine-people. Doomwatch (based on the exploits of the fictional 'Department of Observations and Measurement of Scientific Work') was to be an altogether less fanciful affair. Across its 38 episodes (including one that was never transmitted) Doomwatch brought science into the audience's sitting rooms, unnerving and occasionally terrifying the public with stories about killer rats, plastic-eating viruses, genetic mutation, the dumping of toxic waste and slightly less hysterical topics, such as the perils of jet lag and the difficult business of being slightly too tall.

Doomwatch's head honcho is Nobel Prize winner Dr Spencer Quist (John Paul), a force of nature with his shock of grey hair and a nice line in comfy mustard-coloured cardigans. He's a brusque, no-nonsense guy, riddled with guilt by the death of his wife, from radiation poison, and his own culpability from his work on the Manhattan Project. Quist is passionate, driven and single-minded, but he's no people person – he's terse and officious, even to his closest colleagues – and he's regularly butting

heads with the pompous, blame-averse Minister (John Barron). Doomwatch's man-of-action is Dr John Ridge (Simon Oates), a magnificent early 1970s male stereotype, a symphony of cravats, crazy shirts and prehistoric sexist attitudes. "She's not talking to me because I pinched her bum just before lunch," he offers, as an explanation for why a female colleague is giving him the cold shoulder in the first episode. The breakout star of the first season, though, was Robert Powell as fresh-faced new recruit Toby Wren, who joins Doomwatch in the classic first episode *The Plastic Eaters*. Willowy and animated, Toby Wren became a national heart-throb and his death at the end of the first series (in an episode no longer available, dammit) not only became a water cooler TV moment but also, inevitably, robbed the show of one of its greatest assets. Doomwatch made a number of attempts to replace Wren in subsequent seasons – Jean Trend's Dr Fay Chantry turned up in Episode Four of Series Two and John Nolan as the inquisitive, spiky Geoff Hardcastle drifted in and out of the storylines – but the loss of Powell remained keenly felt throughout the rest of the series' run.

Doomwatch is resolutely a product of its time. Most of it is shot on the now long-obsolete studio-based videotape system, primitive by today's standards but offering an intimacy of performance not always available in modern filmed series; in *You Killed Toby Wren*, the first episode of Series Two, the furious face-off between Quist and Ridge explodes out of the screen and the tension between the two is palpable. In many episodes, there's clumsy use of stock footage, and special effects are often risibly unconvincing; the attack by ferocious

killer rats in *Tomorrow, The Rat* involves actors, with stuffed rats sewn onto their clothes, hurling themselves around the set and pretending to try to wrench the animals free. But like the best British sci-fi (if Doomwatch can really be classified as such) it is about ideas and not effects and, at its finest – especially during the first two series – Doomwatch is extraordinarily gripping and remarkably prescient, often touching on subjects that continue to hit the headlines nearly fifty years later.

By the time the third season rolled around – only three of the twelve episodes exist following one of the BBC's infamous 1970s videotape purges – the show's impact had become diluted, thanks to the interference of producer Terence Dudley. Pedler and Davis walked away from their creation and the show quietly fizzled out – we may never know what delights episodes such as *Safe Knife*, *Fat Man* and *The Killer Dolphins* might have held (although we can make an educated guess on that second one) but this seven-disc DVD set does include the unscreened *Sex and Violence*, the show's very last episode. This is a remarkable piece of television, largely consisting of a group of stolid British character actors playing thinly-disguised versions of polarising anti-smut campaigners like Long Longford and Mary Whitehouse, sitting around a table trying to decide whether the UK's censorship laws should be tightened, as Quist sits in the background watching with interest. Despite its title, there's no sex or violence, just a lot of talking.

If you can cope with Doomwatch's creaky production values and its occasional high-handed moralising, there's much to enjoy in these engrossing, studied dramas. The fact that the series is incomplete in the BBC Archives (only Series Two exists in its entirety) means we can never get a proper sense of the show's scope and scale, or its real strengths and weaknesses, but what remains is a fascinating snapshot of a long-gone era of British television and a brave and forward-thinking series, which dared to put its head above the parapets during an era of rapidly evolving technology. The episodes presented here aren't remastered or cleaned up – many are washed-out looking recordings returned from territories overseas – and the picture quality varies enormously. But the set is still a worthwhile investment for fans of genuine classic cult TV; Doomwatch is more than worth a rewatch.

Extras: *The Cult of Doomwatch* / 2006 TV documentary

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



THE CITY OF LOST CHILDREN (1995)

BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JEAN-PIERRE JEUNET, MARC CARO / SCREENPLAY: GILLES ADRIEN, JEAN-PIERRE JEUNET, MARC CARO / STARRING: RON PERLMAN, DANIEL EMILFORK / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

After achieving cult success with surreal post-apocalyptic comedy *Delicatessen*, directors Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro got to work on fantasy epic *The City of Lost Children*, available now on Blu-ray.

The film's most distinctive character is its villain – Krank, a scientist whose inability to dream has accelerated his aging. In order to save himself, he's been kidnapping local children and stealing their dreams. And then he makes the clumsy

mistake of taking the kid whose big brother is Ron Perlman. Perlman plays circus strongman One, who sets out on a quest to get his bro back, somehow teaming up with orphan Miette along the way.

The most striking thing about *The City of Lost Children* is how amazing it looks. Between Darius Khondji's cinematography, Jean Rabasse's production design, and Jean-Paul Gaultier's costumes, Jeunet

and Caro's team have created an engrossing expressionist artwork. The winding, semi-futuristic, semi-Victorian city brings to mind *Metropolis*; the collection of odd characters, including 'Uncle Irvin', a brain in a tank who speaks through gramophones, resemble Terry Gilliam at his most off-the-wall; and the journey to Krank's ocean lab, surrounded in vibrant green fog, is very much inspired by the imagination of Jules Verne.

Jeunet and Caro populate this stunning world with a dreamlike variety of weird and wonderful characters and whimsical goings-on. The gang of orphans are ordered around by a pair of conjoined twins called the Octopus, a sort of eight-limbed Fagin who runs a school to teach them how to thief – but by the time we get to this point, nothing can come as a surprise any more. A real highlight, which shows off the film's laid-back approach to storytelling, is One and Miette being saved from a near-death situation by a butterfly effect-esque series of events; a flying droplet startles a dog, which angers a tramp, causing

a bird to fly off and poo on a car, which crashes into ... and so on, until you end with an enormous boat crash. Throw away your need for things to make sense and there's a lot of enjoyment to be had.

The problem is that, with everything so whimsical, the story feels rather slight. Whereas Gilliam, for example, uses surrealism to great satirical effect, Jeunet and Caro's story is a simple fairy tale, and not much more, while One and Miette's growing bond is not entirely convincing – it shows up far too often that these two heroes are the least interesting characters in the film.

The City of Lost Children may not have a particularly affecting narrative, but visually it's a masterpiece. So let yourself get carried away by the whimsy and beauty of its world.

Extras: *Featurette / Interviews with Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Jean-Paul Gaultier / Commentary / Trailers*

KIERON MOORE

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



THE MONOLITH MONSTERS (1957)

DVD / CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: JOHN SHERWOOD / SCREENPLAY: NORMAN JOLLEY, ROBERT M. FRESCO / STARRING: GRANT WILLIAMS, LOLA ALBRIGHT, LES TREMAYNE, LINDA SCHELEY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Everyone loves a good old-fashioned black-and-white 1950s American monster movie. *Every-one*. When they're good – Them!, Tarantula, Beast From 20,000 Fathoms – they're the stuff of a million memories, charming and naïve reminders of more innocent times, when nuclear weapons were just bound to cause long-dormant monsters to awaken from their slumbers or arachnids to swell up to enormous proportions, before rampaging around middle America chased by soldiers. Even when they're bad, there's still plenty of entertainment to be had

wincing at naff special effects and stiff-as-a-board acting. The *Monolith Monsters*, from 1957, has emerged from nowhere onto DVD and falls squarely somewhere between the two stools; the characters are little more than bland ciphers and there are no Oscar-winning performances, but there are some good ideas here and there, not least in the central conceit of an alien threat which actually isn't malevolent or especially sentient, just something which has come to Earth and is behaving instinctually and without malice.

A huge meteorite crashes

into the desert outside Los Angeles and instantly explodes, scattering hundreds of tiny black crystalline fragments across the arid landscape. Shortly afterwards, ill-advised locals including a Federal geologist (Harvey) and a schoolgirl on a field trip (Scheley), pick up some fragments which, when exposed to water, demonstrate disturbing – not to say terrifying – properties. Boffins and cops discover that the rocks absorb silicon from human bodies (turning them into stone) and that contact with water causes the rock to expand into towering ebony blocks – monolith monsters, if you will. A rainstorm leads to the fragments in the desert expanding before toppling and shattering into millions of new fragments that, in turn, grow and expand, leading to a relentless tide of monoliths advancing on the nearby town and which, if unchecked, could threaten all life on Earth.

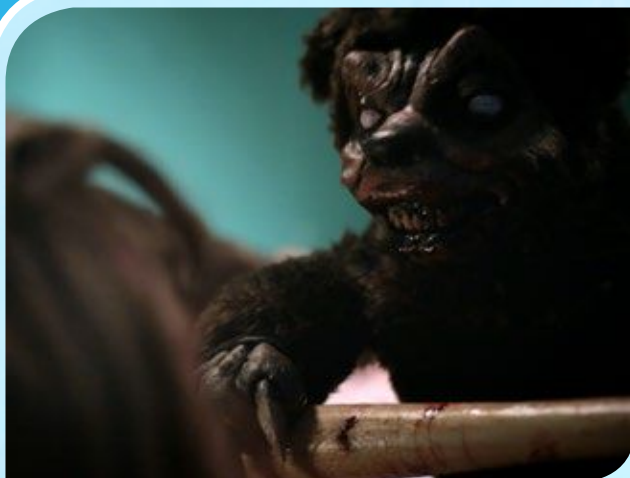
Marvellously unstarry – the only name genre fans are likely to recognise here is Grant (Incredible Shrinking Man) Williams – *Monolith Monsters* is an unexpected and refreshingly lowbrow treat. The monoliths themselves are an uncharacteristic threat to the human race – they're not,

despite the film's title, monsters at all, just a non-sentient extra-terrestrial phenomenon, which reacts to its circumstances on Earth and recreates itself unthinkingly. It's just doing what it does. This alone makes it a more palpable and believable threat than any number of alien invasion fleets or giant underwater behemoths, and the effects work isn't at all bad for a film of this vintage, especially in those scenes where the massive monoliths loom out of the darkness as they 'march' remorselessly across the desert. The resolution is beautifully apt, simple and pleasingly Wellsian, and the whole thing's done and dusted in around seventy-five minutes.

Happily, you're unlikely to feel you've wasted your time. It might have neither the reputation nor the familiarity of the classics of its era but *The Monolith Monsters* is a long-forgotten gem, which deserves its long-overdue excavation and is guaranteed to delight fans of the big, black-and-white, wide-eyed days of sci-fi cinema.

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



CLINGER

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: MICHAEL STEVES / SCREENPLAY: GABI CHENNISI, BUBBA FISH, MICHAEL STEVES / STARRING: JENNIFER LAPORTE, VINCENT MARTELLA, JULIA AKS, SHONNA MAJOR / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When wholesome aspiring athlete Fern (Jennifer Laporte) meets the outwardly geeky Robert (Vincent Martella) she initially thinks she has struck lucky in love. Could this unlikely Romeo be the perfect boyfriend? Well, for a few weeks perhaps, but then the increasingly strange Robert becomes a little too clingy, showering Fern with all

manner of sickly sweet presents and searching for new and extreme ways to demonstrate his love. During one of these displays, which involves a contraption resembling a guillotine, he is decapitated, but so strong are his feelings that he cannot "cross over". Now haunting the beleaguered Fern, Robert decides his (ex-)girlfriend

must die so that they can spend eternity together in death.

Charm can only get you so far, and while Michael Steves' début feature is awash with more than its fair share, it isn't enough in itself to retain your interest. The premise at the centre of Clinger is an interesting one, with love continuing on after death, and is similar in theme to the recent *Horns* or *Life After Beth*, but it never decides which genre to settle on. Moments of gore feel awkwardly worked in, almost like afterthoughts, and the humour never quite rises above the smirk-inducing. There are references aplenty to John Hughes-style teen flicks of the '80s, with more knowing nods than is necessary, but the tone is inconsistent and not many of the homages work. This uncertainty leads to a confused and unsatisfying final act that never seems comfortable with its choices and stumbles towards an overwrought conclusion clearly influenced by Peter Jackson's *The Frighteners*, just without any of the horror or humour.

There's a very real and nagging sense while watching Clinger that the filmmakers are

trying too hard to make a cult film. It's like they decided on a tonal slant towards quirky and whimsical horror-comedy to woo festival audiences and generate a word of mouth campaign that would develop and grow over time. While striving for that kind of recognition and following is credible, if misguided, it's more important to get the film's basics right and sadly Clinger misses the mark just too often.

There are funny moments and it would be churlish to suggest nothing works, but they are fleeting and laboured to a point of becoming tiresome and repetitive. Like the best friend who regularly and innocently utters the seediest of accidental innuendos, the joke wears pretty thin pretty quickly.

Clinger then feels like the inaugural film it is. There were clearly some good ideas, if ones borrowed from too many other films, but those ideas haven't been implemented well enough and sadly what remains is a film that feels much longer than the 80 minutes it is, but one you'll be relieved isn't.

JOHN TOWNSEND

★★★★★ 4



DEATHGASM

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JASON LEI HOWDEN / STARRING: MILO CAWTHORNE, KIMBERLEY CROSSMAN, JAMES BLAKE, DELANEY TABRON, STEPHEN URE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Hailing from New Zealand, *Deathgasm* takes its sensibility from the likes of *Bad Taste* but much of its story from *Shaun of the Dead*, with a whiff of *This is Spinal Tap* thrown in for good measure. It's a likeable, riotous, fast moving black comedy/horror, with enough inventiveness and congeniality to engage from start to finish.

When his mother is institutionalised, guitar-

playing metalhead Brodie (the charmingly pencil-faced Cawthorne) is sent to live with his knuckle-brained cousin David and his Bible-bashing parents, but it's not long before Brodie forms a band (the eponymous *Deathgasm*) with dissolute bassist Zakk (a roguish Blake) and falls for cousin David's bombshell girlfriend Medina (the wholesome, golden-haired Crossman). When

Zakk leads Brodie unwittingly into breaking into the home of reclusive old rocker Rikki Daggers (a ragged Ure), Daggers presses upon them to take the sheet music for a demon-summoning composition before a devil-worshipping cult – who arrive hot on the two teens' heels – can get their hands on it. Daggers is murdered, but before the members of the cult can catch up with Brodie and Zakk, *Deathgasm* have given the tune a trial and the townspeople start getting possessed.

And that's just the first twenty minutes or so. The rest of the film is a hilariously bloodthirsty romp as the winsomely unassuming Brodie and bad boy Zakk find their friendship tested to the limit, while fighting their way through the zombified possessed in an attempt to stop the demon before it can fully materialise – and see if Brodie can get the girl. The whole thing is shot through with a good-natured brutality of the kind you only get in Antipodean cinema, as writer and director Jason Lei Howden finds as many and varied ways for his cast to off the zombified

possessed as possible – including a justifiably infamous scene involving an assortment of sex toys.

This is wilfully cheap and nasty stuff – and joyously, knowingly so – and your enjoyment will depend in parts upon your enthusiasm for heavy metal, your willingness to suspend your disbelief for a multitude of unlikely deaths, your desire to see the nerds win out, and the ability of the young cast to carry all of this off. Fortunately, the central trio are as charismatic as you might wish, and make suspending your sense of the ridiculous an easy task. Howden's cartoonish direction betrays his influence as being as much the *Cornetto Trilogy* and Matthew Vaughn's caricatured action flicks as it is the likes of Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead*, and although short on budget, *Deathgasm* is assured and accomplished enough not to be completely outclassed in that company. A low-rent, but unexpectedly entertaining blast.

JR SOUTHALL

★★★★★ 8



PARASYTE (PART 1)

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: TAKASHI YAMAZAKI / SCREENPLAY: RYÔTA KOSAWA, TAKASHI YAMAZAKI / STARRING: SHÔTA SOMETANI, SADAÔ ABE, ERI FUKATSU, AI HASHIMOTO / RELEASE DATE: APRIL 11TH

Earth is quietly invaded by a race of parasitic aliens that enter through the ears of humans and take over their brains, except for one that targets teenager Shinichi. Blocked by his headphones, the parasite ends up lodged in his right hand, and the two of them end up forced to work together if they want to survive against the hostile alien menace.

There is nobody in the world who does batshit crazy quite like the Japanese. And just so we're clear, this is very much intended as a compliment.

Adapted from a ten-volume manga series, the story sees the parasites use their hosts to feed off unsuspecting humans, leaving behind bloody, mangled and often decapitated corpses in their wake, while they also begin possessing influential people to slowly gain control of society. The film utterly revels in its savage depravity, the blackly humorous absurdity reminiscent of the unfettered insanity of Takashi Miike or Norboru Iguchi.

The core of the film is the developing relationship

between Shinichi and Migi (his parasite, the Japanese word for "right"). Unheard of for the aliens, the two of them remain separate consciousnesses, and while some see them as an experiment to be observed, others take a more direct approach to the potential threat and regularly attempt to kill them. This is where the aliens' fluid morphing abilities come in handy, as Migi is able to shape his makeshift limbs of Shinichi's fingers into razor-sharp blades of flesh capable of dismembering with a single slice. Their growing symbiosis means that each begins to influence the other, with Shinichi slowly losing his sense of empathy and emotion, while Migi is forced to periodically sleep

(which you just know is going to happen at the most inopportune moment).

As the film progresses, the laughs begin to dry up, as sympathetic characters are killed and callous scenes of wanton slaughter become the norm, and there are also some philosophical monologues about the human race's destructive impact upon the planet and some existential rambling on the nature of identity. However, it never stops being a highly engaging and mesmerisingly violent thriller, and ends on a satisfying note that also leaves things well set for its second and final part to pick up.

ANDREW MARSHALL

★★★★★★★ 8



NAVY SEALS VS. ZOMBIES

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: STANTON BARRETT / SCREENPLAY: MATTHEW CARPENTER / STARRING: ED QUINN, DAMON LIPARI, STEPHANIE HONORÉ, MASSIMO DOBROVIC, MOLLY HAGAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Imagine a remake of *Escape from New York* with none of the imagination, humour, iconography, and character that made the original so memorable. Then add zombies, while subtracting a lion's share of the budget. What you're left with is a film that isn't so much bad as it is rather dull.

"AJ" Prescott's first mission as a Navy SEAL is as part of a five-man team

dropped into Baton Rouge to rescue the Vice President, caught in the middle of a zombie attack while on secret business concerning biological warfare. Once there, the team's mission parameters are altered, and AJ finds himself separated from the others, while babysitting a couple of reporters and trying to make the evacuation rendezvous before the city is sealed off.

Matthew Carpenter's script hits most of the beats you would expect from a behind enemy lines military zombie movie, but does so in a robotic fashion that fails to add enough depth to any of the characters or situations meaning that you don't actually care what happens. That AJ is expecting his first child gives him every reason to want to get home, but we learn so little about his or his partner's emotional lives that when he appears to have been irreversibly infected, the shock value is negligible. This same lack of attention to detail is apparent throughout the rest of the genre clichés Carpenter incorporates, the ultimate result being a screenplay that knows where it's going but doesn't bother giving the audience particular reason to want to tag along.

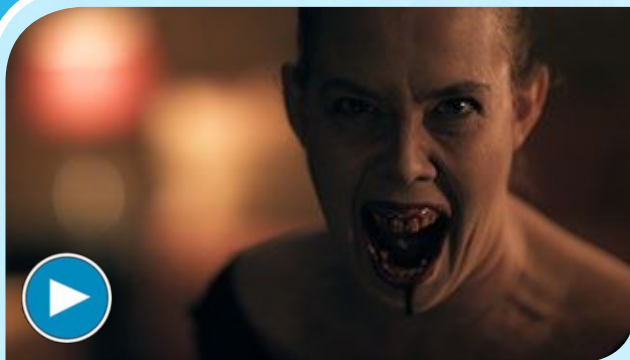
The direction somewhat makes up for the shortfalls in the script. Most of director Stanton Barrett's practical effects budget seems to have been blown on a single scene involving a car (that we get to see lovingly filmed from every

conceivable angle using every camera he could muster), while his CG effects are rather hit and miss. But he does the best his meagre resources will allow, and fans of the genre get to see plenty of empty streets and a reasonable number of marauding undead, even if some of the attack sequences are rather tame and stagey. Much of the final third of the film is set inside a medical facility in a reminder of the debt it owes to *Resident Evil*, and sadly this is where the lack of characterisation allows the tension to disperse.

The acting is passably good, if lacking in charisma, and the music and photography manage to lift the film beyond its natural altitude, making *Navy SEALs vs. Zombies* a passably exciting 90 minutes that nevertheless does little beyond its initial premise to establish itself in an already crowded field. If your expectations are low, then they will be rewarded.

JR SOUTHALL

★★★★★★★ 4



MARK OF THE WITCH

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JASON BOGNACKI / STARRING: PAULIE ROJAS, MARIA OLSEN, LILLIAN PENNYPACKER, NANCY WOLFE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When Jordyn (Paulie Rojas) celebrates her eighteenth birthday and blows out the candles on her birthday cake, she quickly discovers she should have been more careful with what she wished for. She always thought she was an orphan, raised by her aunt (Nancy Wolfe), who ruins Jordyn's birthday celebrations by screaming at the top of her lungs and plunging the obscenely long cake knife into her chest. But her aunt's attempted suicide is only the

beginning – soon, Jordyn realises she is being pursued by a malevolent supernatural force, a hideous Witch (Maria Olsen) who seems to follow Jordyn everywhere she goes, even snips off a lock of her hair before she realises it, and is poised to initiate Jordyn into some truly twisted occult secrets. Jordyn has always wondered where she came from, but is she really prepared to discover what that is? Her journey will take her through

sleepwalking reality-shifts and hurl Jordyn into a cruel looking-glass world. As her aunt warns, "There is something out there... and it will find you, whether you want to be found or not."

Mark of the Witch was originally screened at London's Frightfest 2014 under the title 'Another' (a less sensational title, but a better one) and was quickly hailed as one of the hits of the festival. It was also, in this reviewer's opinion, the best film of that year, so it is great to see it finally appearing on DVD.

This is that rare cinematic accomplishment – an intelligently written, beautifully crafted horror movie that is also, quite often, magnificent to look at. From the bleached browns and greys of the opening sequence to the golden bright eye of the raven that is always close by, to the rich reds and darks of the Witch's boudoir, the photography and art direction of Mark of the Witch is never less than superb. Writer/director Jason Bognacki has accomplished something quite phenomenal with this film and his cast rises to the challenge, especially the stunning Audrey

Hepburn-lookalike Paulie Rojas, whose switches between innocence and dark cunning are convincingly unsettling, Maria Olsen who plays the Witch with an intensity you rarely see outside of the blackest Brothers Grimm fairy tale, and gravel voiced Nancy Wolfe, whose measured tones and heavy lidded eyes make Aunt Ruth a character we're never quite sure should be trusted. Lillian Pennypacker, as Jordyn's best friend Kym, who finds herself violently caught up in all the diabolical shenanigans, also deserves a strong mention.

Don't miss Mark of the Witch. When Lucifer Rising's Kenneth Anger pronounced that cinema could also be a magical ritual, he could easily have been talking about this film. It has tremendous power and it stands alongside Dario Argento's *Suspiria* and *Inferno* as a disquieting depiction of black witchcraft that is also quite gorgeous to behold. Evil hasn't looked this good in a very long time.

IAN WHITE

★★★★★★★★★★10



AMERICAN HORROR PROJECT VOLUME 1

DUAL / CERT: 18 / DIRECTORS: MATT CIMBER, CHRISTOPHER SPEETH, ROBERT ALLEN SCHNITZER / SCREENPLAY: WERNER LIEPOLT, ROBERT THOM, ANTHONY MAHON, LOUIS PASTORE, ROBERT ALLAN SCHNITZER / STARRING: LONNY CHAPMAN, MILLIE PERKINS, JANINE CARAZO, HERVÉ VILLECHAIZE, SHARON FARRELL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Any attempt to bring obscure and unfamiliar films to a new audience is to be admired, and with this new box set, Arrow are proving themselves once again. In this collection, titled as the American Horror Project Volume 1, they have grouped together three films that you may well have heard of, but have likely never seen.

The Witch Who Came In From The Sea is one release made infamous for having been initially banned in the video nasties cull of the early 1980's. Although an attempted prosecution failed, Matt Cimber's film still became embroiled in the witch hunt (apologies brought by the Department Of

Public Prosecutions. In truth, The Witch is less a horror film and more of a tragically dark drama focussing on the consequences of child sex abuse, and featuring a woman whose grasp on reality fails, as she slips into madness. Whatever it's fraught history, The Witch is one of the more interesting films of that tortuous period, and features an engaging performance from Millie Perkins; better known for lead role in The Diary Of Anne Frank.

The next film in the collection, The Premonition is also more psychological thriller than true horror, but it does tap into a parent's inherent fear of child abduction. When a child's mentally unbalanced mother kidnaps her, it falls on the foster parents to track her down with the help of a parapsychologist. What follows is an examination of the slide into an irresistible insanity. The inclusion of a malevolent clown only adds to the fearful imagery but The Premonition becomes a little too confused in the latter stages, by its own premise, to truly frighten or intrigue.

The final film is Malatesta's Carnival Of Blood and this is

a different beast altogether. Ignoring traditional narrative and plotting for surreal imagery supplemented by callous, random acts of violence, this is a film that bewitches you with its occasionally misguided sense of gory adventure. The central concept revolves around the Norris family taking jobs at a rundown and unloved fairground that is presciently skeletal in appearance. Quickly they discover there is something sinister going on behind the scenes, and that this could turn into a very short employment period indeed. Wonderfully random and unavoidably enjoyable, Malatesta's Carnival Of Blood is the real macabre treat in this collection.

What really makes this set worthwhile, as you would expect with an Arrow release, are the extras. With a multitude of interviews, booklets, scripts and commentaries, this is a box set worthy of any horror fan's collection. Even if you, by chance, own any of the included films, you still won't regret spending a few pounds here.

JOHN TOWNSEND

★★★★★★★★★★8



NINA FOREVER

DVD + BD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: BEN BLAINE, CHRIS BLAINE / STARRING: FIONA O'SHAUGHNESSY, ABIGAIL HARDINGHAM, CIAN BARRY, DAVID TROUGHTON, ELIZABETH ELVIN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Holly (Abigail Hardingham) works at the local supermarket and has fallen for the apparently suicidal Rob (Cian Barry), whose girlfriend, the eponymous Nina (Fiona O'Shaughnessy), died in an accident. Fed up with being considered the nice girl, Holly makes it her goal to entice Rob into a relationship to try and save him. She manages to seduce him and their relationship is taken to the next level at Rob's flat. Only

problem is that, when they take it to the bedroom, Nina is not ready for Rob to move on. She appears through the mattress and is determined to wreck the fledgling relationship. Rob and Holly then try and work out why Nina hasn't moved on and ensure that they stay sane in the process – after all, it's not every day that the bloody and broken body of your ex-girlfriend turns up in your bed and comments on your new beau.

The feature-length début of the Blaine brothers, this is a very British film in tone. Darkly comic in all the right moments and close to the edge in others, the whole film has a surreal feel to it, the bastard lovechild of *It Follows* and *Burying the Ex*. The main actors fit the roles perfectly, nice girl Holly trying to break out of the mould given to her by her supermarket colleagues, beleaguered and grieving boyfriend Rob – who still visits Nina's parents, who are having their own marital issues, every Sunday for lunch – and obsessive corpse Nina are all thrown together well as they clash throughout the duration.

Nina is a real treat as she refuses to let go, her atrophied body stopping her from making any physical impression, but her bitchy comments towards Holly being both pithy and humorous. Rob is the right side of irritating as he tries desperately to move on with his life.

There are a lot of sex

scenes here, but they manage to stay relevant as this is the main entry point (behave!) for Nina, even though it causes the living couple to change their sheets every time they have sex. Nina is an obvious third wheel in proceedings and it's interesting to see some of the deleted scenes explained by the directors as they do add something to the story and character development.

Nina Forever is filmed mostly in cold colours, which really makes the blood vibrant when it appears on screen, announcing Nina's imminent arrival. Overall, the film appears to be about loss and obsession, but who is obsessed more – the living or the dead?

This is a dark, twisted treat from a pair of directors who it may be worth keeping an eye on, as well as the future career of Hardingham.

JD GILLAM

★★★★★★★ 7



AMONG THE LIVING

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTORS & SCREENPLAY: ALEXANDRE BUSTILLO, JULIEN MAURY / STARRING: ANNE MARIVIN, THÉO FERNANDEZ, FRANCIS RENAUD, ZACHARIE CHASSERIAUD, DAMIEN FERDEL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Directorial duo Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury are a brilliant force in French horror. Behind them, they have *Inside* (2007) and *Livid* (2011), both are thought-provoking, intense and grisly pieces of work. Among The Living is their most recent French feature film and though this horror has a more innocent and lighter tone, it is still filled with lurid scenes that will get your heart beating. Bustillo and Maury have the talent for creating perfectly timed jump scares, built up with spine-tingling moments. Among The Living does just that but with a hint of satire and some classic slasher movie tropes.

Three boys, Victor, Tom and Dan, skip school to start their summer holidays early.

They soon get themselves into trouble, which eventually leads to them wandering through an abandoned film lot. It is here they encounter a nightmare when they witness a screaming woman being dragged across the lot by a masked man. Foolishly they decide to be heroes, attempting to save the woman themselves. When seen, they run for it; after getting away they try to tell the police, but when all the police find is a bunch of mannequins, they assume it's just their imagination and their reputation for trouble makes them less believable. The boys are then dropped off at their respective homes but little do they know that the masked man is close behind them.

Although the premise is fairly basic, there are multiple layers to the storyline, with each character having their own motivations and story. The character development is done extremely well. You care for the three boys, and you especially care for Victor and his family. It's a mixed bag of themes, but it comes together as both as a drama and a horror film, which the French are so good at doing. You could say the film is very much a creature feature; the movie hints that genetic mutation must be linked to our monstrous slasher known as Klarence. Klarence is an abnormally large being and appears to be asexual, as we see him largely naked throughout the film. He seems inhumanly strong and fast, so one could argue he is some kind of superhuman or freak which is why his father hides him away.

What actually ties the film all together is the very first scene. Typically, it's Halloween, but a struggling family is avoiding trick 'r' treaters. A pregnant woman suddenly driven with torment and madness attacks her husband, beating him down, she then goes upstairs to her son, Klarence, who is hiding behind the curtain, and tries to stab him but he swiftly moves from her reach. The husband finally

intervenes. Heartbroken and traumatised, the husband runs away with Klarence, evidently different from other little boys; he promises his son that they will start a new family and disappear from the world.

The cinematography is beautiful and because of the settings, much of it looks more like an indie drama than a horror film. The contrast of the serene natural settings against the derelict film lot drastically changes the tone just as it drastically changes the characters, who are no longer carefree or having fun. They've taken the themes of a coming of age film and flung it into the macabre. Bustillo and Maury are able to present death in many interesting ways, both on and off camera, where your imagination can take over; which, for some, can make the scenes even more horrifying. The duo will be focusing on boyhood once again with the upcoming prequel to The Texas Chain Saw Massacre franchise, *Leatherface*. They have a definite cinematic style that brings a sense of quality and beauty to the genre, which should be a good step to reviving a classic franchise.

SAMANTHA WARD

★★★★★★★ 8



SUPERNATURAL: SEASON 10

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTORS: VARIOUS / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: JARED PADALECKI, JENSEN ACKLES, MARK A. SHEPPARD, MISHA COLLINS, FELICIA DAY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Who would have thought that when *Supernatural* first aired in 2005, the monster hunter Winchester brothers would still be roaming North America, murdering the things that go bump in the night? At this point, it's starting to look like Sam and Dean will be beating werewolves to death with their Zimmer frames.

The previous season of the long-running horror TV

show saw a return to form after a slow and steady decline. Season Ten manages to keep this level of quality up, by finely balancing new and fresh ideas with the familiar tropes that have made this show so popular.

Season Ten opens with a corker of a premise. Dean, one of the major heroes of the show, has gone to the dark side and has buddied up with the King of

Hell for hijinks and evil. It's up to little brother Sam, to lure him back to the light, or at least a light shade of darkness.

Highlights include the 200th episode, Fan Fiction, which does the thing the producers have threatened to do for years; it gives us 'Supernatural the Musical'. Luckily for us, the Winchester's don't sing. To say that this episode goes one step beyond the usual fare into the meta side of things is an understatement, but then the show has never been afraid to experiment. Ask Jeeves experiments in a different direction; using the brother's skills as eye-candy to its full potential by setting them amongst the well heeled idle rich for a short while. This season also sees the welcome return of Felicia Day's spunky hero, Charlie Bradbury. Season Ten is decidedly darker than previous stories, and fans should brace themselves; things are going to get a lot worse for the brothers, but in a good way. Prepare for more than one single man tear.

As always, the featurettes and DVD extras are a treat. After ten years of producing

the show, you'd think the actors and crew would have ran out of things to say about their jobs, but this time round the various DVD extras keep it fresh by focusing on the show's relationship with its fans. *Supernatural* fandom is very dedicated it seems, and the lengths they go to in order to express their love for the show is pretty amazing, and makes for a good documentary. We also get an edited version of the cast's panel at SDCC 2014, which is always worth a laugh. It seems that our perennial wayward sons will continue to carry on for some time to come.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



THE HALLOW

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: CORIN HARDY / SCREENPLAY: CORIN HARDY, FELIPE MARINO / STARRING: JOSEPH MAWLE, BOJANA NOVAKOVIC, MICHAEL MCELHATTON, MICHAEL SMILEY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Both interesting and flawed, *The Hallow* is an independent horror movie directed and co-written by Corin Hardy, who makes his feature debut here. It takes place at a remote house within an Irish woodland settlement, which is home to a couple with a young baby, and the father is surveying the forest for a development project. Despite warnings from the local residents, he finds a mysterious black oily substance, which turns out to be a cordyceps-like parasite, and from that, hordes of demonic

creatures that prey upon the lost arise. Alone and deep within the darkness, the couple must now fight back to protect their son against the relentless attacks by these ancient forces.

Hardy has ended up with an uneven eco-themed horror flick. One of the aspects where the film succeeds is in its realisation of the monsters; the effects are well executed, and the design and mannerisms are creepily eerie and unnerving. However, the film is at its strongest when it doesn't have

to deal with creatures, but instead deals more with its brooding sense of menace and despair. That is also embodied well in the performances, with Joseph Mawle buying into the ordeal that his character goes through, while Bojana Novakovic buys into the danger of their situation.

The rest of the small cast don't get that much to do, with Michael Smiley included only to spout Basil-exposition in a thankless cameo. The film falters when it attempts to reconcile its fantasy narrative of bad fairies with the edgy, home invasion sequences, which obviously owes a debt to *Straw Dogs*. At one point, it reaches a level of shrieking hysteria during the film's middle section, but the film finds a hard job in maintaining that momentum towards the end.

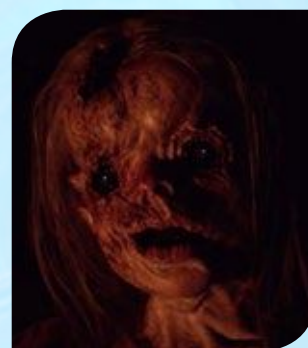
However, even though the film as a whole doesn't quite hang together, there are still individual elements and set pieces that are genuinely arresting, including the night-time sequence set by a creepy lake, which has an atmosphere that is altogether impressive, spine-chilling and weird all at the same time. The film's concepts and locales pay homage to past

horror movies and thrillers, such as *Deliverance*, with its eco themes and the devils of the woodland obviously inspired by *The Evil Dead*.

So in the end, *The Hallow* is a flawed, yet interesting, film that benefits from solid performances, impressive creature effects and moments of genuine intrigue and atmosphere. Not everything comes together and it is ultimately rough around the edges, but because of how strong some the individual elements are, this film does promise big things for Corin Hardy's future.

RYAN POLLARD

★★★★★★★★★★ 7





INTERVIEW - JEAN PIERRE-JEUNET

Jean Pierre-Jeunet's output has delighted fans for decades, and will no doubt find a new audience with the re-release of THE CITY OF LOST CHILDREN. We were thrilled to chat to him about the film and more...

STARBURST: A new Blu-ray release of *The City of Lost Children* has just come out. What's the reason for the new release?

Jean Pierre-Jeunet: Just because it was the only film I made that wasn't in Blu-ray and I love the quality. Here we have made some restorations, to make some DCPs (digital cinema packages). I spent a lot of money myself to make some restorations to *Delicatessen*, but *City* was a big work. We had to fix some defects – the colour grading wasn't so easy – but we have now a beautiful DCP. And a beautiful Blu-ray. So I am very happy!

You tend to work with the same actors in your films, for example, Dominique Pinon, Rufus and, of course, Ron Perlman in *The City of Lost Children* and *Alien: Resurrection*. Do you find this makes the filmmaking process easier?

Dominique Pinon is special because he surprises me in every movie. It's a kind of game now – I couldn't imagine a film without Dominique. Sometimes I was close to losing him – for example, for *The Young and Prodigious T.S. Spivet*. He plays

the hobo in the wagon. At the last minute, he was free so he's in the film. It's a kind of game now.

I love so much the cinema of the '40s, the French cinema. I'm looking for interesting faces, character actors. In France, there are not so many, so maybe that's the reason I use him all the time.

There's a lot of imagination and dark humour in your films – where does that come from?

I believe in imagination. I am not very interested in reality. In France, they love realistic cinema. They hate when it's aesthetic. They love to work with reality. For me as a director, it's not interesting. It's like doing photography. I feel like a painter. It's probably because I come from animation. I was speaking about that with Terry Gilliam a long time ago. He was saying exactly the same thing. When you come from animation you like to control everything. Recently I was in London at the Tate Gallery and I saw the Turner exhibition. This guy was transforming the reality because he was a painter – I feel like a painter. I don't care about the reality.

I think an artist has to have a special look on the world otherwise it's boring.

You've been compared to Terry Gilliam before, is that something you take as a compliment?

Yes. Now I lose Terry Gilliam a little bit. I didn't see his last movie (*The Zero Theorem*). But he was a master. We had an interview together for Studio magazine. He put a line on the poster of *The City of Lost Children* to help with the release of the film.

What was it like directing the fourth *Alien* movie, *Alien: Resurrection*?

You know, I didn't feel like going to Hollywood. I was starting to write *Amélie* at this time but how could I refuse to go make a big Hollywood movie? I was a young French director. And this time it was pretty new – not many French directors in Hollywood. Now everyone does that. So I couldn't refuse. In any case, I thought I would be fired after two weeks – I couldn't speak any English at all. I had a translator all the time.

It was a great experience. I had almost total freedom. It's impossible to imagine – I was alone on stage. Of course, there were the details of the casting and the editing, but more or less I had the freedom. Nothing compared to France...

***Amélie* was a very personal film for you. You got lots of nominations and awards for that. How do you think that changed you and your perception as a director?**

It's like I had some injection that gave me a big head! It gives you confidence – you are confident when you have such a big success. It's a dream for every director to make something so personal and it's a big triumph. Sometimes I thought I was dead and I was in paradise. And everyone played a character like in *The Truman Show*, but in the opposite way, do you know what I mean?

Also, it gave me the possibility to find a lot of money for *A Very Long Engagement*, and I suppose now I still find the possibility to find money because I can say to the finance people – look at *Amélie*.

We read that you originally wanted to cast Emily Watson (in *Amélie*) and then Audrey Tautou came along. You said within five seconds that you knew she was right for the part. Did you believe that was meant to happen, or was it just a happy accident?

Yes. Every time when you have an accident it gives you an opportunity to make something better. I don't want to say Audrey Tautou is better than Emily Watson. I am sure Emily would have been a great *Amélie*. A little bit different, much more Bridget Jones probably. Older. But I am the only one to be sure she would've been great. After I hired Audrey, everyone told me she was too young. But now nobody can imagine Emily Watson except me.

JONATHAN ANDERSON

THE CITY OF LOST CHILDREN is out now on Blu-ray.

AUDIOSTATIC

THE LATEST NEWS
FROM THE WORLD OF
AUDIO ADVENTURES
BY TONY JONES

STRANGENESS IN SPACE

Crowdfunded science fiction comedy **Strangeness in Space** has now reached Episode Three, **Step Back in Time** with guest star Alexie Sayle. Not content to rest on their laurels, they are now fundraising for the fourth episode (£2,000 of £5,000 raised at the time of writing). The guest star for this episode will be Paterson Joseph and the episode will be called **Pet Shock Boys**. Joseph will play a character called The Puppymaster.

Radio Static

Dan Freeman's Radiostatic are also deep into crowdfunding for the fourth episode of their latest series **The Light of September**. The first episodes are available on iTunes and star Tamsin Greig as Captain Dalton, piloting the first ever light-speed ship. The cast also includes Sylvester McCoy and Robert Picardo amongst others.

The earlier multi-award winning Radio Static production **The Minister of Chance** has been acquired by Amazon and is available as a director's cut CD direct from Amazon or the Radio Static website. This features the talents of Tamsin Greig, Sylvester McCoy, Jenny Agutter, Jed Brophy, Paul McGann, Paul Darrow, Philip Glenister and many more.

Big Finish News

Several announcements from Big Finish to whet the appetite this month. Firstly, Sheridan Smith is returning to recreate the character of Lucie Miller for the **Short Trips** range of **Doctor Who** stories. Lucie Miller was a companion for Paul McGann's Eighth Doctor, and was namechecked in the 'minisode' **The Night of the Doctor**. Sheridan has recorded two stories written by Alice Cavender and Andrew Smith.

Torchwood fans will be pleased to hear of the return of Suzie Costello, who appeared in the first episode of the TV series, and was played by Indira Varma. Suzie will appear in the fourth episode of the second series of **Torchwood** audios, **Moving Target** by Guy Adams.

Finally, there are two **Short Trips** coming for Nicola Bryant as Peri. These are Sixth Doctor stories, written by Dan Starkey and a Fifth Doctor story, **Rulebook** written by Tony Jones [whoever he is].

NIGHT TERRACE

Award winning Australian sci-fi comedy **Night Terrace** returns for a second series and stars Jackie Woodbourne (**Neighbours**) as Anastasia Black, a scientist from a shady government organisation, travelling in time and space in a Melbourne terraced house.

Other stars include Louise Jameson, and a number of Australian comedians and actors. **Night Terrace** is produced by Splendid Chaps Productions.

STAR TREK: CITY ON THE EDGE OF FOREVER

Another fiftieth anniversary **Star Trek** project is in the midst of crowdfunding, last month this column mentioned **Star Trek Excelsior**. This time, it's the Skyboat audio production of Harlan Ellison's **The City on the Edge of Forever**. For those too young to remember this was an award winning adventure in which James Kirk fell in love with Joan Collins's Edith Keeler. The story gained much notoriety as it diverged in many ways from Ellison's

original script, and it is this script that forms the basis for this new audio project. The cast will include Ellison himself, along with Levar Burton (Geordi La Forge in **Star Trek: Next Generation**).

What's On the BBC

Radio 4 Extra will be running a series of 40-minute adaptations of classic episodes of **The Twilight Zone** on Saturdays from March. There will be 10 episodes in this first run, some of which were originally broadcast when the station was Radio 7. First up was **An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge** by Ambrose Bierce, which should be still available on BBC iPlayer. A documentary about the original TV series' creator and prolific screenwriter Rod Serling is also available to listen to on the iPlayer service.

BIG FINISH WE LOVE STORIES

Key titles to watch out for this month from Big Finish...

CALL ME JACKS: JACQUELINE PEARCE IN CONVERSATION

The much-loved actor and star of **Blake's 7** on TV and audio chats to Big Finish's Nicholas Briggs about her life and work. Although her most famous role was Servalan in the sci-fi classic, she also appeared in **Doctor Who's The Two Doctors** serial and played the titular role in Hammer Film's **The Reptile**. This promises to be a fascinating listen, as Ms Pearce certainly pulls no punches, and the release comes with a listeners' discretion notice for the language used.

AVAILABLE MARCH 31st

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TORCHWOOD 2.1 THE VICTORIAN AGE

A retro episode of the popular series sees Captain Jack Harkness (John Barrowman) heading the Torchwood Institute of the 1890s, hoping that nothing will go wrong during a visit from Queen Victoria and the Empress of India. Naturally, a sudden appearance from a creature on the streets, throws a spanner in the works.

AVAILABLE MARCH 31st

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DOCTOR WHO: FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES 5.03 THE PARADOX PLANET

The Doctor (Tom Baker) and K9 (John Leeson) have lost Romana (Lalla Ward) while under attack from a Time Tank in the vortex. This leads them to Aoris, a planet tearing itself apart with war. Time-shifting soldiers are only part of the problem to deal with, as the Time Lords fight to save opposite sides of a temporal war.

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REVIEWS

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AND RATED



SODIUM PARTY (2013)

COMPOSER: STEVE NOLAN / PUBLISHER: SPUN
OUT OF CONTROL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Sodium Party is the perfect example of why certain releases are necessary on physical media. A concrete delineation between portions of Steve Nolan's score, provides tangible means by which one realises the separation. Having to open the cassette deck, take out the tape, flip it over, reinsert it, close the door, and then press play – that's an act more substantial than flipping a record and dropping the needle. Somehow, Spun Out of Control has perfectly encapsulated the particular nature of Sodium Party by presenting it in a format, which would otherwise seem unnecessarily retro.

That's all a very lengthy prelude to explaining that, essentially, Steve Nolan's score for the film Sodium Party is of two complementary, but different aspects. The short-form explanation is that Side A beauty, Side B madness. Both are absolutely brilliant, and ostensibly divided into separate tracks, but the very nature of a cassette blurs those lines of where one piece ends and the other begins. Given that there's not physically observable delineation as one has with a vinyl LP, or the very separate individual entities that are digital files, one can only take each side as a half.

Initially, there was a set of digital files we were checking on to see what each track was specifically, but this honestly isn't the best way to listen to Sodium Party. It's so much more satisfying as two halves, rather than 15 tracks. The build-up on Side A results in a listen that's just so absurdly satisfying that to try and encompass it with words is just as equally unsatisfying. Suffice it to say, it's either the best way to come off a really rough night, or to start the morning after. It's like a warm blanket and a hot mug of tea, maybe with a biscuit or two.

Side B is every decision you've ever made that led to a throbbing head, gurgling stomach, and cold sweats. The tense build of the opening lets the listener know that we're not in a very different place than we'd just been, and it's now time to strap the hell in, because things are about to get uncomfortably

bumpy. Whereas Side A was all warm and cozy piano, Side B is cold synths with sharp edges. Even the quieter moments have a strange growl hidden in their depths. This is terror in a way that we don't often hear: it's minimal, but out of planning, not necessity.

As we heard on Side A, Nolan can make rather lovely, full music. He's intentionally pulling back and reigning himself in at times on the flipside, so as to be able to really overwhelm the listener when he opens up the throttle and lets the music fly. It never gets fast, thankfully – that's why the sides are complementary, rather than contrasting. In both modes, Nolan is operating a slow burn, preferring to add layers, rather than upping the tempo. The fuller these dark pieces of madness get, the more disconcertingly dissonant they become.

Spun Out of Control's release of Sodium Party does an excellent job of servicing Steve Nolan's score. From the two-tone cassette itself, with the lighter first side in white and the darker second in black, to the fantastic audio quality, to the minimal and effective J-card, this is a cassette worth owning and listening to as it was released. If you can get your hands on a tape player, you won't be disappointed.

NICK SPACEK

★★★★★★★★★10



STAR WARS: THE ULTIMATE SOUNDTRACK COLLECTION

COMPOSER: JOHN WILLIAMS / LABEL: SONY MUSIC
CLASSICAL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

First, let us get the obvious bit out of the way. Whether you are a dyed-in-the-wool fanatic or someone who is only vaguely aware of the adventures of Luke Skywalker and his pals, there is no more recognisable a piece of film music than John Williams' soaring main theme from Star Wars. The scores to some of the most iconic productions of all time are quite simply stunning, and this collection of soundtracks from the first six films, brings the music together for the first time in one handy place. The scores from the original trilogy do stand out but the prequels are interesting for their variations on a theme, and of course for the soaring Duel Of The Fates. There is even a disc featuring interviews with Harrison Ford and Williams himself, and a "musical journey" narrated by Ian McDiarmid that, while playing like an elongated trailer, is worth watching.

The main problem is in whom this is for. The availability of streaming services

ensures no shortage of soundtrack options and the resurgence of vinyl (this collection is also available in this format) provides some nostalgia for those who want it. Who then will fork out nearly forty pounds for a few CD's?

The next issue comes in the form of the packaging. While the main box itself is fairly aesthetically pleasing, the discs inside are contained in flimsy cardboard sleeves, which give the whole thing a distinct impression of cheapness. A few mini postcards feel almost condescending for their inclusion.

In musical terms this would make a decent gift for the Star Wars fan in your life, but only if you'd explored other alternatives. And make sure they have a CD player! Well, you never know.

JOHN TOWNSEND

★★★★★★★6



THE KNICK SEASON 2 (2015)

COMPOSER: CLIFF MARTINEZ / LABEL: MILAN RECORDS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Cliff Martinez's score for the second season of the Cinemax series, *The Knick*, is as tightly-wound a collection of music as one would expect for a show that frequently deals in touch-and-go situations. The frequently utilised steel drums bring to mind Martinez's work for *Solaris*, and when one considers the stakes for the operations in both instances, it makes total sense.

The score is a bundle of nerves all the way through, but the manner in which

the composer expresses the various emotions connected to the tension is what makes *The Knick*'s second season score so interesting. The electronic throbbing and pulsing seems most influenced by the likes of Jamaican dub reggae, working quietly as it does. The impending sense of "something is going to happen" or "something is happening" is demonstrated not so much by the music, but by the space within.

Listening, the music will go from the dense first track of "Dearest John," packed as it is with steel drums; to the wide-open and swirling "It's My Eye." That is followed by "If Anyman Thirst," with a sparse guitar line trading places for a calliope. It all changes so quickly, but the underpinnings of relentless

forward movement and unseen dangers or threats keep, in Martinez's score.

"Get Well or Jump Off" is a paranoid delusion of tense energy, but it's most effective because of the repeated dips into slowed-down, quiet passages. The middle third drops out most of the heavier tones, leaving one with a metronomic drumbeat accented by trippy, dubbed-out horns. It then ramps up intensely, right at the end. It's the best piece on the album, and nigh on impossible to stop listening

to. However, it's very taut, and leaves you feeling so tense afterward, that you may need of a drink and a lie-down.

"Humiliating Sewage" and "Sonia XXL" are so quiet, one wonders if pieces were left out, forgotten in the digital cutting and pasting that is editing these days. Their emphasis on needing to listen and pay attention really puts forth the sense that Martinez is trying to get the listener to really notice what is happening. They're so absolutely different in execution, though, so these tracks seem a bit of an anomaly.

That is a point almost complimented by the penultimate track. Whereas the two pieces mentioned previously stand out because of their almost overt restraint, "Do You Smell That" is so big, so loud, so absolutely action-oriented; it can't help but appear to be a statement of "now look at this!" Still, though: there is that tension, and when the volume drops, and there's a xylophone plinking out notes while the electronics subtly continue underneath, we are as listeners aware of the impending explosion that is to come.

The electronic score's notes of analog instrumentation are what really elevate *The Knick Season 2* over and above what might be a standard bit of music. Tension's readily achieved when one goes and goes and goes, but Cliff Martinez's willingness to pull back and let things build back up shows off the fact that this is a man who knows what he's doing, and he knows how to do it well.

NICK SPACEK

★★★★★★★ 7



CARNACKI, THE GHOST FINDER

PUBLISHER: BIG FINISH / DIRECTOR: SCOTT HANDCOCK / WRITTEN BY: WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON / STARRING: DAN STARKEY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Do yourself a favour before the evenings lengthen out; download these adaptations of William Hope Hodgson's century-old stories of ghost-hunting Thomas Carnacki, light a few candles about the room, turn off the lights and allow Dan Starkey's readings to reduce you to a funk of goose-flesh – for that will surely be the result!

Hodgson's stories, out of print in

the UK for six decades after their 1913 publication, are something of a revelation. Carnacki, a quiet, flat-talking man routinely invites four friends, including the self-consciously named Dodgson, who provides the wraparound narration, to his home for dinner, after which each night he recounts one of his many adventures investigating the apparently supernatural. It's a little *Most Haunted* by way of Jonathan Creek, each investigation leading to a revelation of one kind or the other – the listener firmly glued to their speakers to discover whether the foul play described has a paranormal or more corporeal explanation (or some combination of the two). From such a very simple premise, Hodgson has terrific fun leading his reader up or down the garden path, Carnacki's claim that only one in a hundred investigations leads to an abnormal outcome thankfully not being the ratio of ghostly goings-on in this collection!

Fortunately, Starkey's readings aren't as flatly toned as Hodgson might have supposed Carnacki to be, the eponymous Ghost-finder's recitation being mostly very factual in nature and nonetheless effective, when he does become more spirited – often with some self-deprecating anxiety on his own behalf. Starkey has a voice you might listen to all night, perfect for Hodgson's prose. The stories, written between 1910 and

two years later (Hodgson having himself perished during the Great War), are exceedingly spooky in a very genial way; there's a tremendous evocation of the times and places Carnacki visits, achieved in a deceptively easygoing fashion, which, alongside the frequent relating back to previous cases that aren't in the author's canon (and regular interjections of "Do you see?"), immeasurably helps towards giving the Ghost-finder plausibility in the ears of the listener.

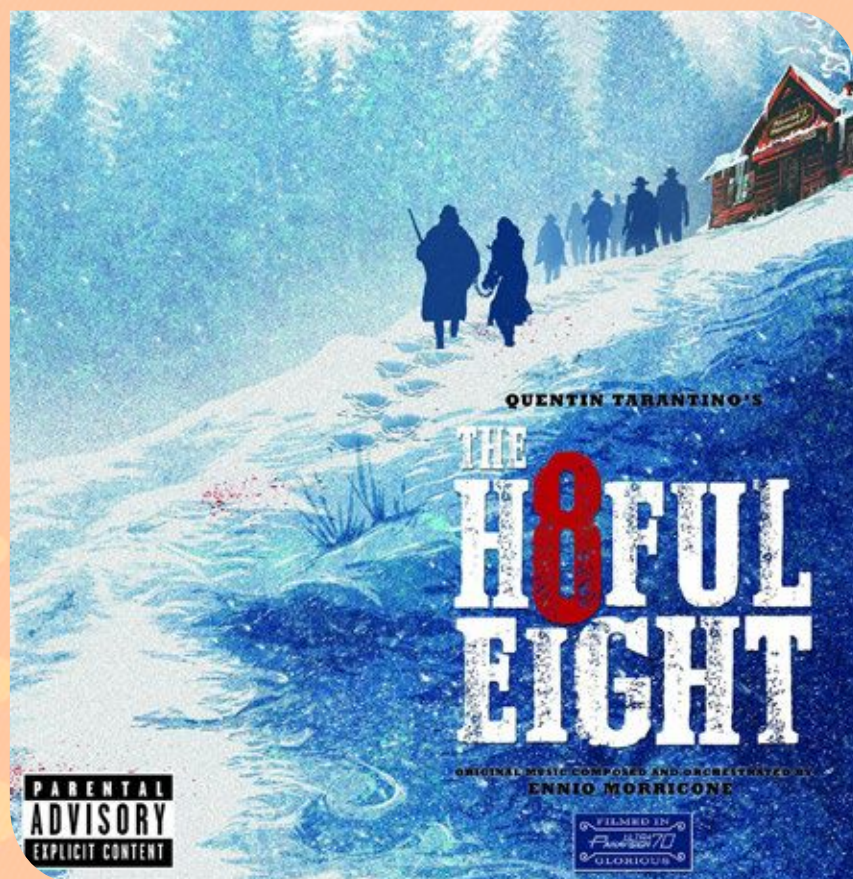
There are six investigations included, each one slightly short of an hour in the recounting, these being the half dozen that were originally included in the collection's first publication (if successful enough, let's hope Big Finish will adapt the further three that were added later). The language and characterisation are deliciously contemporary, and the whole set will transport you back to a time before the first war, when radio was still in the future, and first-hand storytelling was a wonderful way to pass an evening. There are considerably less wonderful ways to pass an evening or six, than by letting Dan Starkey set the hairs on your neck to stand on end!

J.R. SOUTHALL

★★★★★★★ 9

OST

THE STARBURST
GUIDE TO THE LATEST
SOUNDTRACKS
BY NICK SPACEK



The oldest ever winner of an Academy Award went to Ennio Morricone, who won an Oscar for his score to Quentin Tarantino's **The Hateful Eight**. We talked last month about our confusion as to how Morricone's score was even eligible, with parts having been taken from unused cues for **The Thing**. All that said, however, we're very happy for El Maestro, who did, in fact, turn out an excellent collection of music for the film. Now, if we could just figure out a way to listen to it without cringing at all the dialogue snippets.

As if that wasn't enough, Morricone also received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame at the end of last month, which is about damn time. One would've assumed this was something happened decades ago, but sadly, no. Thankfully, the 87-year-old composer's still around to appreciate it, and had some humble words regarding the honour.

"I never thought I would work for the big crowd, but I always thought that I would work for the service of art,"

Morricone said through an interpreter at the event, which was facilitated by **The Hateful Eight** director and longtime Morricone fan Tarantino.

In the month between last month's column and this one, Death Waltz Recording Co. demonstrated how quickly they could announce, release, and sell out of a title. In this case, they teased the very excellent soundtrack to the equally wonderful 2014 home invasion thriller **You're Next**. It went up and sold out of its limited edition of 1000 copies on bloody bedsheet vinyl in just a couple of hours, but the label's Spencer Hickman promised via Twitter, *"There is a retail Edition of **You're Next** coming: 500 for the USA and 500 for Europe. One-off pressing, never to be repressed."*

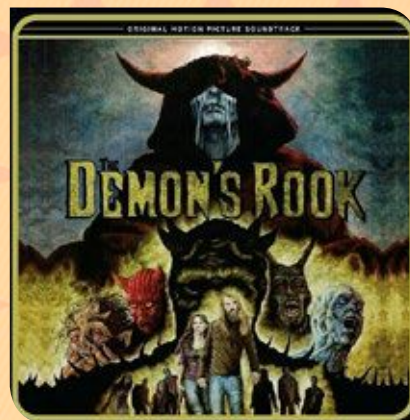
After a bit of a holiday lull, Death Waltz seems to be back in the thick of it. Obi strips for recent releases tease upcoming possibilities like **Dracula A.D. 1972**, which was also confirmed via a Twitter image. No clue as to whether it's just Mike Vickers score, or if we'll also get

those two songs by Stoneground featured on BSX's compact disc release from 2009, which were featured in the film itself. The scene featuring *Alligator Man* is an exceptionally groovy piece of '70s cinema.

Dracula A.D. 1972 is complimented nicely by the announcement of yet another piece of '70s horror cinema: the classic and underrated **Let's Scare Jessica to Death**. As near as we can determine, Orville Stoeber's score has never before been released, so nice job there, folks. It's nice to see Death Waltz getting back to these vintage scores after a spate of newer releases (including, finally, heavy metal splatter fest *Deathgasm*). We love everything, but their bread and butter has always been these great old obscurities given loving care.

On a slightly more populist note, but equally as exciting for those who were hoping to be able to buy the prequel scores on vinyl in a way other than a huge box set costing hundreds of dollars: I Am Shark confirmed that **Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones** will be out this spring as a double vinyl LP. It's due out right around the time your eyes read this sentence, so we suggest snagging one of the first 1000 copies on silver and royal blue 'Jango Fett' vinyl while they last.

Poisoned Mind Records has been releasing some really excellent horror and film inspired music from the likes of **Merlin** and **Wolfmen of Mars**, but it's been a minute or so since their last actual soundtrack release, with Chester Turner's **Black Devil Doll from Hell**. Thankfully, the score to the 2013 fantasy horror **The Demon's Rook** will be out this month from the label. As per usual, the labels' offering multiple versions of the vinyl. There's black or opaque



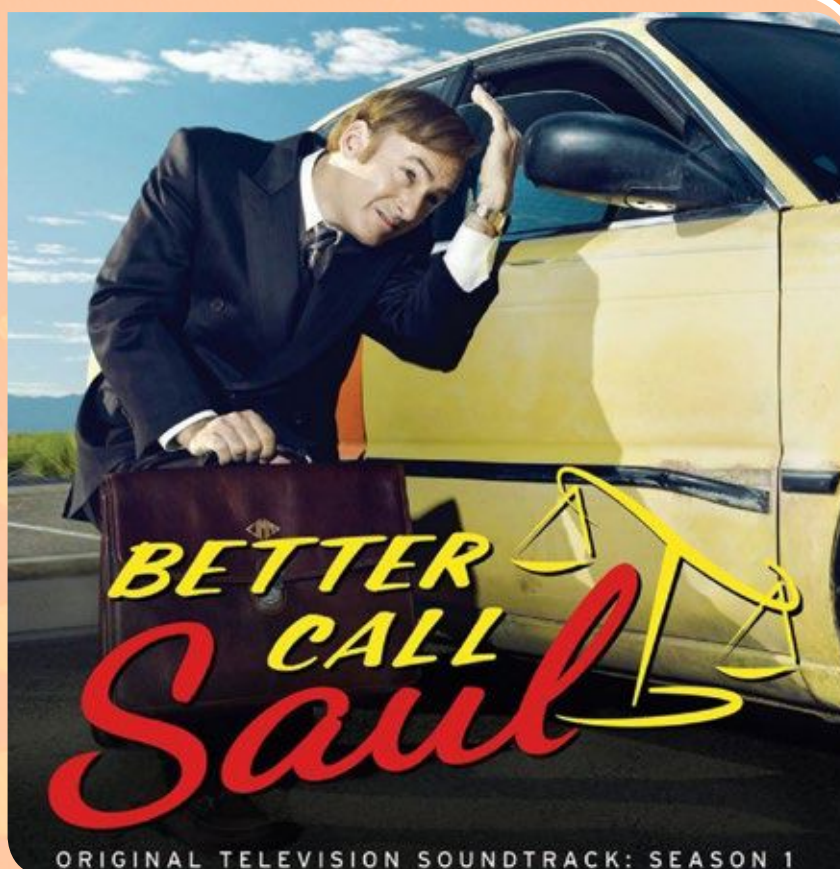
blue in the standard jacket, as well as a limited-edition screened jacket with gold and black splatter vinyl. The score runs from spooky atmospheric chanting á la Krzysztof Komeda's **Rosemary's Baby** or Jerry Goldsmith's **The Omen** – the best in satanic horror, obviously – or doomy psychedelia akin to Shooting Guns' work on **Wolfcop**. We're looking forward to spinning it, as should you.

Should you like your music more electronic, the eerie synth score to the online Batman versus Jack the Ripper short film, **Ripper**, is out digitally via Bandcamp. Metal Machine Music did all the work, and it's far more listenable than an act referencing such a difficult listen might otherwise imply. If you like your Carpenter, Goblin, or Frizzi, this is right up your alley. We also hear talk of a vinyl release later this year.

Speaking of John Carpenter, the man's going on tour! It's probably already sold out, if he's even coming to your neck of the woods, but the very fact that some of us have even the slightest glimmer of hope of seeing the Horror Master perform his iconic music right in front of our very eyes is enough reason to rejoice. The tour takes place around the world this summer, and we're hoping to have an account of one of his stateside performances for you. Fingers crossed. Add in the fact that we've a second **Lost Themes** record coming our way from Sacred Bones, and it's a very good time to be a John Carpenter fan.

Clint Mansell's score to **High-Rise**, the Ben Wheatley adaptation of the J. G. Ballard novel, is out this month from Silva Screen Records, and it's a bit of a surprise. It's good, which is no surprise at all to anyone who's ever heard a Mansell score, but what really takes the cake is that this is a remarkably straightforward collection of music from the composer. Given Mansell's usual dreaminess, the rather big orchestral score sounds hearken back to the '70s. Thanks to the composer's skills, however, it becomes a retro-futuristic score, using harps and strings, along with xylophone, in ways which flirt with Mansell's ominous electronic presence. Calling it sci-fi might be stretching things, but it's obviously worth examining.

If you're excited about the second



season of AMC's **Breaking Bad** spin-off, **Better Call Saul**, you've two opportunities to snag the first season soundtrack. The collection features the program's theme song by Little Barrie, as well as the **Better Call Saul** song by Junior Brown, amongst other cuts used in the show. Music on Vinyl has it on 180 gram 'Chicago Sunroof' coloured vinyl, which is a kind of marbled gold, along with a business card, bumper sticker, and fridge magnet. The version from Spacelab9 will be on either 'Jimmy's Lemon' yellow vinyl, only available from Barnes and Noble booksellers or in 'Desert Sky Blue' vinyl from the Spacelab9 website.

For the Stelvio Cipriani fans in our audience, you've two new releases about which to get excited. Quartet Records' compact disc release of **Quel Pomeriggio**

Maledetto marks the début of the 1977 Lee Van Cleef film's soundtracks in any format, and the label calls it a mod-flavored score for fans of **Mission: Impossible** – two things with which we're always down. Lee Van Cleef is always a mark of interesting film, as well, so we're excited to check out this one.

The other release is for another 1977 film. This time, it's a double LP release of the score to Ovidio Assonitis' killer octopus movie, **Tentacles**. It's on clear vinyl from Dagored, and given the fact that all the other vinyl releases have been single LPs, we're guessing that this will include the bonus tracks from 2011's remastered Digitmovies compact disc. Either way, the embossed gatefold packaging looks fantastic, as per usual from the Italian reissue label.





DOCTOR WHO: THE PETERLOO MASSACRE - INTERVIEW

DOCTOR WHO, by his time-travelling definition, can appear at any point in human (and alien) history, so it's only natural that real-life events can be depicted from time to time. **THE PETERLOO MASSACRE** is once such occurrence that has been incorporated into a new audio drama from **BIG FINISH**. We spoke to writer **PAUL MAGRS** and script editor **ALAN BARNES** about the project...

One of the forthcoming Fifth Doctor adventures, *The Peterloo Massacre* is set in 1819 during one of the darkest periods of Britain's history, the story focuses on the real world horror in which an armed cavalry attacked a crowd of thousands who had gathered at St Peters Field in Manchester to demand parliamentary reform.

Paul Magrs [pronounced Mars] is best known for his Iris Wildthyme series and script editor Alan Barnes, whose credits include *Judge Dredd: The Megazine* and *The Hammer Story*.

STARBURST: Tell us about *The Peterloo Massacre*...

Paul Magrs: It's what they call a 'pure historical', about terrible events in Manchester in 1819. The TARDIS team of 1983 find themselves separated and caught up in a riot that happens in the middle of a peaceful protest in the very heart of the city. It's a timely tale of rich versus poor.

Where did the idea for using *The Peterloo Massacre* for a *Doctor Who* story come from?

Alan Barnes: After *The Lady of Mercia*, which was a Dark Ages kind of affair, I asked Paul if he was interested in writing another historical, because I think he's got a knack for bringing past characters to life – what I don't like in historical adventures is that 'Look, here's my library card' sort of approach, where you sort of get overwhelmed by dates and names and places. It's all about what it was like to be among those people at that time, and how they perceived things – the dry facts and chronology are just the window dressing. Both Paul and I were keen to explore another part of specifically working-class northern English history, too; because classic Doctor Who, I think, often had an

unthinking southern upper and middle-class bias, and I think it's important to keep an eye on that. Actually, I think I told Paul I wanted 'non-Govean history'!

Initially, I suggested Wat Tyler and the Peasants' Revolt, but Paul, not unreasonably, pointed out it might end up a bit too much like *Mercia*, all rebels and dashing-about. I must admit, when he suggested the Peterloo Massacre instead, the thought scared me half to death: my fear was that it might be heading into overwhelmingly dark waters, and that it'd be hard to directly involve the regulars in so awful a situation. But then, that would be the challenge. I was also very worried that we wouldn't be able to give the Doctor some sort of... well, not 'victory', exactly, but that we wouldn't be able to exit the piece without him having made the situation better in some way, which is why he's called 'the Doctor', after all. But Paul took all my concerns head-on. I guess that people are going to compare it to *The Massacre of St Bartholomew's Eve*... but in that, the massacre itself occurred off-screen, half-way through Part Four. What Paul's done is to set a large part of his story – more than an episode – right in the heart of the slaughter, which is far braver, actually. You're going to hear the before, during, and the after too.

Why did you decide to do another historical drama?

PM: Because that's what some of the earliest *Doctor Who* stories set out to do. They wanted to elucidate moments of complex history and educate their audience. All I want to do – less lofty than that, perhaps – is to tell a cracking good story about a series of events that people might only know a little about.

Will we hear more historical adventures from Big Finish, then?

AB: I don't think it's something we should do all the time, because, like I say, the trap is that one can end up doing 'library tourism' rather than telling a good, *vital* adventure story. The other pitfall is 'the threat is history being changed'. Which is a bit of a dramatic cul-de-sac, in my honest opinion. Blah, blah *The Web of Time*, blah – it's all very remote, and it's been done to death, actually. But absolutely, they have a place. Perhaps, though, it's better to do the odd one every so often, and make them *really* special when we do – like *The Angel of Scutari*, or *The Wrath of the Iceni*, or *The Peterloo Massacre*.

Do the events of Peterloo still have an impact on today? Do you think we could be in danger of forgetting?

PM: Yes, I think we are. I only knew a little, and only after I moved to Manchester. It's a big historical moment – in terms of ordinary people getting the vote and protecting the poor against the greed of the terribly rich. It's a key moment in working class history, and also the very beginnings of the women's movement, in some ways. At a time when – in so many ways – the clock is being turned back to the nineteenth century – it's good to know about episodes like this. We mustn't go back to those terrible times when the gap between rich and poor was unfathomably wide.

What other *Doctor Who* stories do you think could be set in the North West?

PM: I don't know yet! Something about the Romantic Poets in the Lake District, perhaps. Surely there should be one about Cilla Black when she was working in the cloakroom of the Cavern Club in Liverpool?

Why use the Fifth Doctor for this story?

PM: He's a great favourite of mine. I was twelve when he started – the perfect age for being a *Doctor Who* fan. Also, when writers are asked by Big Finish, it's often with a Doctor/companion/genre/setting combination already in the producers' minds.

ED FORTUNE

THE PETERLOO MASSACRE stars Peter Davison, Sarah Sutton, and Janet Fielding and is directed by Jamie Anderson. It's available from March 31st via bigfinish.com.



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GENRE LITERATURE

BRAVE NEW WORDS



Alan Moore's JERUSALEM to be Unleashed

Alan Moore's shelf-shattering novel, **Jerusalem**, will be available for sale in September 2016. Though Moore is world famous for comic books such as **Watchmen** and **The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen**, **Jerusalem** is only his second regular novel. It is a fantastical exploration of his hometown of Northampton, and is said to be about a million words long. Moore has stated that he has used multiple styles to construct the work, including chapters inspired by the likes of James Joyce, Samuel Beckett and Enid Blyton.

Margaret Atwood wins Kitschies Red Tentacle

The Kitschies are tentacle themed awards that are given for novels containing elements of the speculative and fantastic.

The Red Tentacle (Outstanding) - Margaret Atwood for *The Heart Goes Last*.

The Golden Tentacle (Debut) - Tade Thompson for *Making Wolf*.

The Invisible Tentacle (Digital) - Square Enix for *Life Is Strange*.

The Inky Tentacle (Cover Art) - Jet Purdie for *The Door That Led to Where* by Sally Gardner.

Humanitarian fund-raiser Patrick Ness received The Black Tentacle award, which is granted those who encourage and elevate the conversation around genre literature.

Samhain Publishing Closes

American small press publisher Samhain has announced that it will be winding down its operation. The small press title boasted New York Times bestselling authors such as Maya Banks and Lauren Dane, and although it published horror, fantasy, and science fiction titles, it was best known for its romance-related output. The company will continue to process royalties and completed books will still launch, but it has reduced its staff with the intention to conclude business moving forward. We will all those currently working through Samhain the best of luck in the future.

Nebula Awards Nominees Announced

It's clearly award nomination season in the world of genre literature. The Nebula Awards are produced by The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, and its members choose the nominees. Awards are given to Best Novel, Novella, Novelette, and Short Story. There are additional awards for dramatic presentation and works marketed to young adults. The Best Novel shortlist is: **Raising Caine** by Charles E. Gannon (Baen), **The Fifth Season** by N.K. Jemisin (Orbit US; Orbit UK), **Ancillary Mercy** by Ann Leckie (Orbit US; Orbit UK), **The Grace of Kings** by Ken Liu (Saga), **Uprooted** by Naomi Novik (Del Rey), **Barsk: The Elephants' Graveyard** by Lawrence M. Schoen (Tor), **Updraft** by Fran Wilde (Tor).

The 2015 BSFA Awards prepare for Easter(con)

The British Science Fiction Association has announced its shortlist for its coveted BSFA Award. The winners will be announced this Easter at Mancunicon in Manchester. Categories include Best Novel, Best Short Story, Best Art, and Best Non-Fiction. The Best Novel shortlist is: **Europe at Midnight** by Dave Hutchinson (Solaris), **Mother of Eden** by Chris Beckett (Corvus), **The House of Shattered Wings** by Aliette de Bodard (Gollancz), **Luna: New Moon** by Ian McDonald (Gollancz), **Glorious Angels** by Justina Robson (Gollancz).

Genevieve Cogman to Write More INVISIBLE LIBRARY Books

Fans of **The Invisible Library** series by Genevieve Cogman will be delighted to learn that publisher Tor has acquired the rights to the fourth and fifth novels in her popular series. The books deal with the adventures of a pan-dimensional library and the exploits of the Library's agents, who can go anywhere books can be found. The third novel in the series, **The Burning Page**, will be out in December 2016.

Horror Writers Association Honour Alan Moore and George Romero

George A. Romero and Alan Moore are to receive the prestigious Lifetime Achievement award from the Horror Writers Association. The award will be officially announced at this year's StokerCon in Las Vegas, the world's premier horror writers convention. It will be presented during the Bram Stoker Awards ceremony alongside other awards for superior achievements in horror-related fiction.

Authors Bicker Over Uniqueness of Works

Young Adult fantasy authors Cassandra Clare and Sherrilyn Kenyon have begun legal proceedings against each other due to alleged similarities in their works. The novels of both authors are filled with tropes common to the Urban Fantasy and Young Adult markets, and fans are watching the results of these actions with interest.

STARBURST's own book podcast, **THE BOOKWORM**, is filled with all the latest news, reviews and interviews and can be found on Twitter @radiobookworm

COMING SOON

ED FORTUNE
HIGHLIGHTS
NOTEWORTHY
NEW TITLES



SUPERNATURAL: MYTHMAKER

AUTHOR: TIM WAGGONER
PUBLISHER: TITAN
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 28TH

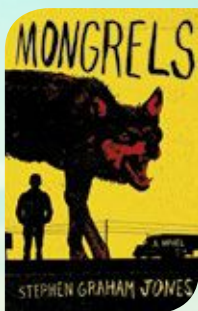
Tim Waggoner is one of those tie-in authors who always seem to be able to get an immediate grip on a franchise, so his take on the adventures of Sam and Dean Winchester should be worth a look. The plot revolves around a talented artist living in a small Illinois town. Renee loves drawing the strange gods that come to her when she sleeps. Her drawings seem to have the power to make them real. When the Winchesters interfere, the new gods begin to form cults and soon, a battle for supremacy breaks out.



ARROW: OLIVER QUEEN'S DOSSIER

AUTHOR: NICK AIRES
PUBLISHER: TITAN
RELEASE DATE: MAY 13TH

It's always nice to have a 'book of the show' if you're a fan. **Arrow: Oliver Queen's Dossier** is pretty much an executive summary of the show so far, with all the fine details defined, including how the various weapons work, who the key heroes are and, of course, a comprehensive dossier on every single villain encountered thus far. It's not the same as a diary filled with the dark secrets of Starling City left to you by your dad, but it's close enough for us.



MONGRELS: A NOVEL

AUTHOR: STEPHEN GRAHAM JONES
PUBLISHER: WILLIAM MORROW
RELEASE DATE: MAY 10TH (KINDLE), JUNE 16TH

Mongrels is a strange mix of drama and horror. It's a tale about a young boy who sees himself as an outsider. Poor yet resilient, he lives in the shadows with his Aunt Libby and Uncle Darren, who stubbornly make their way in a society that has no idea how to respond to them. It promises to be a spellbinding and darkly humorous coming-of-age story about an unusual boy who struggles to survive in a hostile world that shuns and fears his family.



TREKONOMICS: THE ECONOMICS OF STAR TREK

AUTHOR: MANU SAADIA
PUBLISHER: PIPER TEXT
RELEASE DATE: MAY 31ST

It's all very well the crew of the Starship Enterprise going on a jolly jaunt through the cosmos, exploring new worlds and all that, but someone has to pay for it all, surely? Manu Saadia explores the ins and outs of a post-scarcity society and looks into what mechanisms we would have to employ in order to balance abundance, purpose and productivity. By doing so, we also learn more about our own economic limitations and what can, perhaps, be done to make the world a better place.



THRONEWORLD

AUTHOR: GUY HALEY
PUBLISHER: BLACK LIBRARY
RELEASE DATE: MAY 17TH

The Beast Arises series has a very welcome 'kitchen sink' approach to the **Warhammer 40K** universe. So far we've had Space Marines, the Imperial Fleet, the Imperial Guard and Orks - lots and lots of Orks. In fact, so many Orks that it seems the Imperium of Man may well be overrun by greenskins. Just as things seem like they couldn't get worse, the Eldar turn up. **40K's** iconic space elves tend to be a nuisance at the best of times, but this time they may well tip the balance for the fate of mankind.



STARFLEET LOGBOOK (STAR TREK)

AUTHOR: JAKE BLACK
PUBLISHER: PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE
RELEASE DATE: MAY 17TH

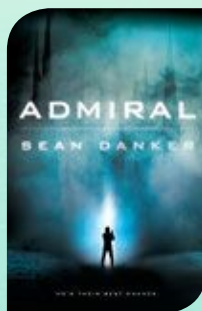
This is such an odd and fun idea that we had to give it a mention. **The Starfleet Logbook** is a kids' activity book inspired by the original series, and is being marketed as a way to encourage your children to join Starfleet. Can your child out-logic puzzle Spock? Can your little one boldly place crayons where no crayon has been placed before? This hardback looks like a great treat for Junior Trekkies everywhere, though we doubt it will take a five-year mission to finish it.



COMPANY TOWN

AUTHOR: MADELINE ASHBY
PUBLISHER: TOR BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: MAY 17TH

Madeline Ashby is best known for her intricate sci-fi worlds that seem all too likely. Her latest offering, **Company Town**, is set on a city-sized oil rig owned by one very wealthy, powerful, byzantine family: Lynch Ltd. The company has populated its synthetic country with slightly artificial people; pretty much everyone has been bio-engineered in some way. All except Hwa, a bodyguard and mercenary who's all-too-human-skills are in high demand. Just as well, really, as the youngest member of the Lynch family needs protecting, and Hwa's job is to look after him. Unfortunately for Hwa, a seemingly invisible serial killer is on the loose.



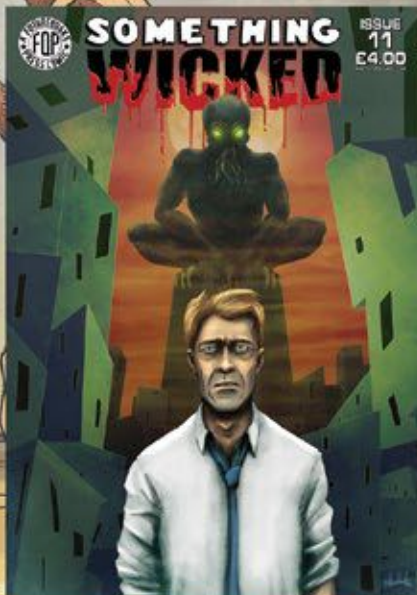
ADMIRAL

AUTHOR: SEAN DANKER
PUBLISHER: ROC
RELEASE DATE: MAY 3RD

Described as a mix between **The Martian** and **Stainless Steel Rat**, Sean Dancer's **Admiral** is the tale of man on a dead starship headed to an unknown planet with three trainees who barely know themselves, never mind being able to do their jobs. Worse still, the recruits have no idea who he is or why he's with them. But he's the Admiral and he's in charge. A sci-fi thriller in the old-school style, the one looks set to be a powerful page turner.

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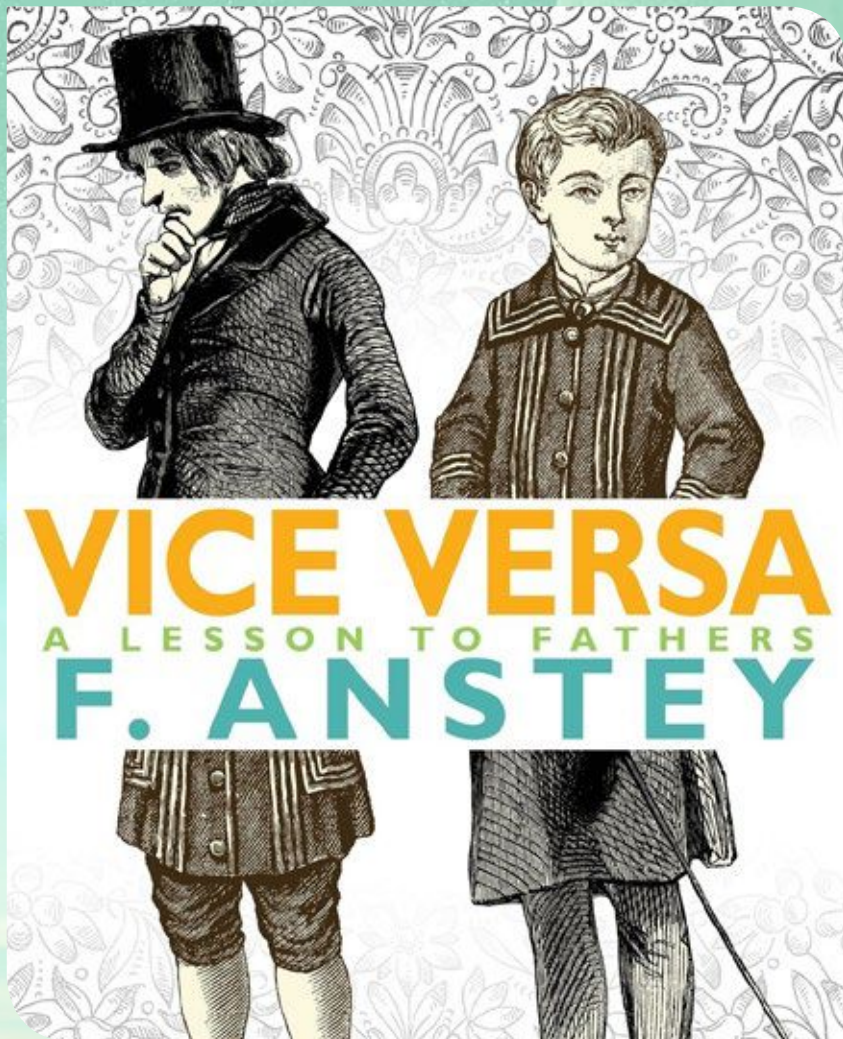


www.futurequake.co.uk

Artwork by Conor Boyle, Steven Austin & Matt Sandbrook

BOOK WORMHOLE

A MONTHLY PICK
OF GENRE FICTION
BY KATE FATHERS



shapes how the characters go forward in the rest of the book. Dick begins their journey triumphant and happy. Paul is angry and miserable. And with nothing to engender respect, they don't take any care with each other's lives.

Such a rocky start completely alters not only the story itself but its conclusion. In *Freaky Friday*, this experience leads the mother and daughter to form a greater appreciation for each other and the things they do for their family. In *Vice Versa*, while Dick learns to appreciate the hard work his father does, I'm not that convinced Paul learns anything at all. Throughout the story, Paul rails at being trapped in his son's body, refusing to alter his behaviour even though it makes him unpopular - even though it makes *Dick* unpopular. In fact, sometimes he seems to forget he's living *Dick's* life. Paul blunders around speaking like an adult, and demanding to be treated like an adult, and shunning *Dick's* friends, and not once does he consider how this behaviour, and its consequences, will affect his son. Not once does he empathise with his son, who daily endures the same trials Paul finds so unbearable. It's rather ironic, given that the novel's subtitle is *A Lesson to Fathers*. But then, this is a Victorian book; it could be that to Anstey's initial audience, Paul was quite changed.

While I love exploring the differences between *Vice Versa* and *Freaky Friday*, there is one area where I wish they were similar: their structure. The *Freaky Friday* movies explore both the mother's and daughter's stories, but Anstey chooses to keep his focus on Paul. Given that this book is 'to Fathers' that's understandable, but I wish I had the opportunity to compare and contrast *Dick's* experience with Paul's. It would make the novel feel a little more complete. It would also give us readers a chance to appreciate further and sympathise with *Dick* as we watch him struggle with adulthood. Readers - fathers - are supposed to learn a lesson along with Paul, and that lesson would be richer if we fully knew the son.

Vice Versa may be wonderful due to its *Freaky Friday* connections, but it's also fantastic on its own. It's funny, although some of the jokes don't quite translate across the centuries. It's dense in the way many Victorian novels are, but it's still sharp and full of vivid characters and beautiful description. It's also an early example of comic fantasy, a subgenre that has given us writers like Christopher Moore, Tom Holt, and Terry Pratchett. If you're a fantasy fan, then this book belongs in your library. I know you'll appreciate it.

It's the end of the Christmas holidays, and no one in the Bultitude house is happy. Son *Dick* is being shipped back to boarding school. Father Paul is anxious for him to get there. And both of them wish they were in the other's place. Their wish is granted when *Dick* finds a stone from India, gifted from a visiting uncle, and they find themselves in each other's bodies, living each other's lives.

Sound familiar? *Vice Versa*, published in 1882, was written by Thomas Anstey Guthrie (under the pseudonym F. Anstey), and while it's been adapted into a number of films and television shows, its most famous impact has been as the inspiration for Mary Rodgers' novel (and Disney's successful films) *Freaky Friday*.

We all know the bare bones of the *Freaky Friday* story, or at least how it appears in the movies: a parent and child, accidentally swap bodies, and by the end of the story they learn to appreciate each other. In this way, it's almost identical to *Vice Versa*. But in the details, there is a huge difference between them, and that's a large part of what makes this book so fascinating. The key difference is that in *Vice Versa*, the body swap is not a total accident. Paul accidentally wishes himself into his son's body, but instead of using the magic stone to change his father back, *Dick* chooses to not only keep Paul that way but to transform himself into the image of his father. What is a uniting force in the films now only serves to deepen the divide between parent and child, and that

THE LATEST RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



ELEANOR

AUTHOR: JASON GURLEY / PUBLISHER: HARPER VOYAGER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The publishing industry is in an interesting place at the moment. Anyone can start a small press printing business from the comfort of their own home and though many of them fail, the ones that succeed often do so because they produce something new, exciting and remarkable.

Jason Gurley's *Eleanor* is the story of a grieving family. When Eleanor's identical twin dies, the family is torn apart with regret. As the book unfolds, however, we get a very different story, one filled with journeys to other lands, timetravel and self-discovery. It has plenty of twists and turns, but the pacing is so relaxed we don't notice the changes until it's way, way too late. This is a powerful book for mature minds.

Eleanor started out as a small-press work that has now been picked up by a major publisher. On the face of it, this is a book that simply shouldn't work. Its introduction is too slow, its premise is quite frankly weird and the story is incredibly sombre and heart-breakingly sad. Gurley's writing style is reflective and steady, forcing the reader to consider

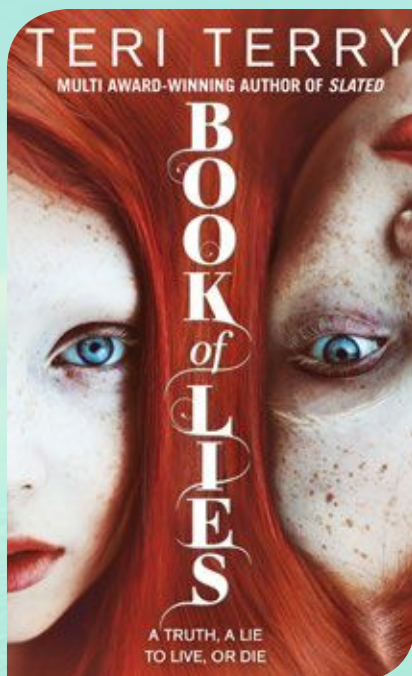
every word on the page. It shouldn't work. It really shouldn't. This should be a slow book with incomprehensible tangents.

What we get instead is a skilled and lovingly designed journey into a modern fairy tale, one that evokes the skill and style of authors such as Graham Joyce and Neil Gaiman at their finest, especially Joyce's later work.

Like a lot of fantasy novels set in the modern age, it mixes real world issues (alcoholism, grief, etc.) with the surreal and unusual, to create something memorable, different and new. *Eleanor* is a tough book in that it's emotionally draining and slow, yet at the same time compelling. If not for Gurley's online following, we doubt this would have ever gotten onto the shelves of your local high-street bookstore and yet we are very glad it did. For all its unusual qualities and odd behaviour, *Eleanor* is a truly remarkable piece of fiction and will most likely be on your shelf by the end of the year.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★ 9



BOOK OF LIES

AUTHOR: TERI TERRY / PUBLISHER: ORCHARD BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: MARCH 24TH

Quinn and Piper are twins, although – until they meet at their mother's funeral – neither of them knew about the others existence. Apparently.

Quinn was the exiled one. She has lived with her grandmother in the wilds of Dartmoor ever since she was born, and has always believed there is something evil inside her. That can only be the reason why, on the few occasions her mother visited, she treated Quinn with such disdain. Her grandmother, who earns money as a fortune teller and is seemingly feared by everybody, didn't treat Quinn any better.

Piper, on the other hand, was the chosen one. She was raised by her mother and father in a comfortable house, she has everything she wants and takes it all for granted, including her boyfriend Zak.

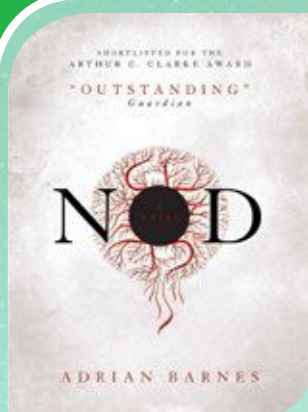
Why did their mother and grandmother work so diligently at keeping Quinn and Piper apart and what will happen, now that they are united? What is the inheritance that only one of the twins will be able to claim, and why do they share dreams of running with a pack of hellhounds across the moors, ripping apart any unfortunates who stray into their path? Are the hellhounds related to the pack of dogs that killed their mother and will they ever be able to defeat the curse that has plagued their family for centuries?

Teri Terry, who previously authored

the bestselling *Slated* trilogy, has pulled a rare trick – a Young Adult fiction that can not only be read and enjoyed by people much older than its target demographic, but which manages to tell a complete and compelling story in a single volume, without making us wait for an unnecessarily drawn-out part two and three. But that's not to say that *Book of Lies* is limited in scope; it's actually a deftly written character study of two siblings trying desperately to come to terms with each other and the different griefs they feel about the death of their mother, while also uncovering the secret of where they actually came from. The supernatural elements of the story don't truly kick in until the second half of the novel, and when they do the characters of Quinn and Piper have been so well defined that the inclusion of the hellhounds and the family curse feel totally realistic. Terry's interweaving of 'Black Shuck' folklore into the main plot is also impressively well handled. Highly recommended, especially for those who like their fantasy subtle but chillingly effective, and populated by characters they can believe in.

IAN WHITE

★★★★★★★★★ 10



NOD

AUTHOR: ADRIAN BARNES /
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS /
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Adrian Barnes' debut novel *Nod* is an interesting take on the end of the world. Imagine if, rather than zombies, aliens or natural disaster, everyone simply failed to be able to go to sleep? End of the world scenarios are standard fare for genre fiction; there's nothing quite like tearing down society in order to throw it into sharp reflection. In *Nod*, the method in which everything ends is the key focus, and it's through this we learn more about ourselves.

The story follows Paul, an unlikeable chap who writes books about unusual words for a living. He has a reasonably nice life - a decent partner, a good flat and plenty of people around him that he can passive-

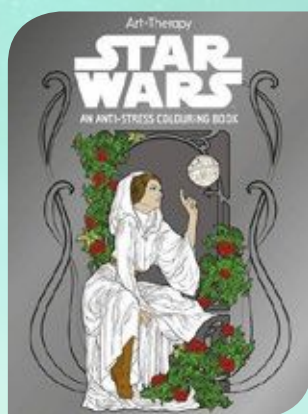
aggressively judge. He also is one of the few human beings still capable of sleeping, as everyone else rapidly devolves into crazy, twitchy beings, unable to deal with the world in a rational way. As the novel progresses, the writing style becomes more dreamlike and difficult to quantify. As the events unfold, people become less coherent and sane, as does the narrative. This throws the normal world into sharp reflection. *Nod* is not a book about fighting zombie-like monsters in an apocalyptic world; it's about the collapse of sanity that leads to the end.

Nod originally came out as a small-press book and it does show; there's a refreshing lack of polish (especially toward the

end); Barnes has been permitted to take risks with his narrative and this is mostly a good thing. The narrative is a firmly compelling one, and despite its strangeness, it's quite a comfortable read. It actually benefits from being read in one big gulp; it's just easier to empathise with a world full of fatigued and cranky people when you yourself are on your fifth cup of coffee. *Nod* is a book for dreamers who have become scared to dream, making it a delightful bit of horror. Give it a go, but get a good night's sleep first.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★☆☆ 8



STAR WARS - AN ANTI-STRESS COLOURING BOOK

AUTHOR: NICOLAS BEAUJOUAN /
PUBLISHER: HACHETTE PRATIQUE /
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Star Wars has always had the best toys and spin-off media. From books, games, and AT-AT toys that you could pretend were a cool robot dog, adventures in a galaxy far far away certainly seem to inspire all sorts of neat things. Due to the plethora of tie-in products out there, it would not be unreasonable to think that there would be no way that they could produce a colouring book that hadn't been done to death.

Star Wars - An Anti-Stress Colouring Book is something a bit different from the usual 'crayon in' affair we get with the Star Wars brand. Colouring books for adults are a relatively new genre and we're already starting to see subgenres form. Some books are simply designed for fun and ease of use, whilst

others are a bit more considered.

Star Wars - An Anti-Stress Colouring Book is a genuine attempt to create a tool that will help people relax, whilst at the same time geeking out over how cool Darth Vader is. Each black and white illustration is a mix of Star Wars icons and an Art Nouveau style. For example, we may have a lovely picture of Princess Amidala resting upon some very intricately drawn (and quite abstract) roses. Or a drawing of Leia in a Jabba's Palace outfit, surrounded by a wonderfully rendered mix of Tatooine-style desert stylings and Rennie McIntosh.

Unlike the vast majority of colouring books of this nature, the first consideration for every design is mindfulness. Pick up some pens and relax as you

doodle away on a pleasing geometric pattern that uses Stormtrooper helmets as its main inspiration. The book is also fond of repeating patterns; there are two pages of simplified images of R2-D2 that are a delight to modify, and would make for nice and relaxing (if geeky) wallpaper. Some of these pages are just lovely in their own right and can be quite easily enjoyed without modification.

Obvious tie-in this may be, but it's a very good anti-stress book and the addition of Luke, Leia, Yoda and chums just adds to the fun. So dig out those Star Wars-branded colour pens, you know you want to.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★☆☆ 8



THE GUNS OF IVREA

AUTHOR: CLIFFORD BEAL /
PUBLISHER: SOLARIS BOOKS /
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

A few years ago, pirates beset the worlds of fantasy fiction. Not the online kind, but the ocean-going type that seemed firmly inspired by certain Disney

movies featuring pirates. Alas, many of these tales lacked both character and world building, and the interest in all sorts of swashbuckling shenanigans seemed lost at sea. *The Guns of Ivrea* looks set to buck this fishy trend, by being a cracking piece of salty fun.

Clifford Beal is best known for his ability to twist history into intriguing fantasy, and this time he's chosen the Renaissance and created a pseudo-mediterranean Europe, filled with fantastic beasts, mermen and, of course, pirates. The plot follows the misfortune of four lucky heroes. Captain Nico Danamis is a dashing young sea captain who has inherited an Admiral's commission, though really he's nothing more than a smuggler and privateer. The equally

dashing named mercenary captain Julianus Strykar, who seems to have a ready supply of heroes for hire at his beck and call, aids him. They're both drawn into a series of bad life choices when a humble thief turned monk, Acquelonius Galenus, crosses their paths. The monk is carrying a terrible burden and secret, one that sees him hunted by the Church. Meanwhile, Citala, a beautiful Mermaid Princess, has other plans for Nico.

Though fantasy takes on Renaissance Europe are nothing new, Beal moves everything along at such a quick pace that the book feels cinematic and interesting. There's little innovation or invention here, rather the author calls upon old myths and gives them a shiny

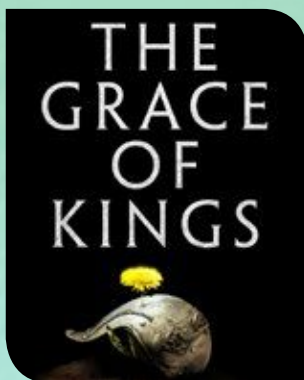
gloss, which lets you enjoy old-fashioned monsters and heroes in fresh ways.

The book does have some rather clunky moments. For example, a scene designed to show the villainy and horror of a key antagonist is rather too graphic and unpleasant, in a disturbing rather than gory way. Luckily, these elements are few and far between.

If you're a fan of Michael Moorcock and Fritz Leiber, you will most likely love Clifford Beal; *The Guns of Ivrea* proves that Beal can deliver addictive, page-turning pulp which also happens to have fun characters and nifty world building.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★☆☆ 8



THE GRACE OF KINGS

AUTHOR: KEN LIU / PUBLISHER: HEAD OF ZEUS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Ken Liu has received Hugo awards and a World Fantasy Award for his short stories. Now he has released his debut novel, which is a big epic fantasy that is likely to gain many fans of the genre.

The Grace of Kings is the start of a trilogy. The story focuses on the Islands of Dara, which have been put together under single banner by Emperor Mapidéré. As the Emperor faces his deathbed, this then leads to the start of an epic confrontation as a race is made to establish a balance of power within Dara. There are two central characters, Kuni Garu and Mata Zyndu

and both have separate motivations to rise against the imperial army of the Emperor. As they form a gang of bandits and an army, they join together as they try to change the political stance in Dara and put an end to the corruptive rule of the Emperor. Heading a war, it becomes clear that the aftermath could lead to an even greater battle for power.

This raises some moral issues, with a fine line between whether the war to take power from the Emperor is right or wrong. Ken Liu creates some vivid and detailed characters that will be loved by fantasy fans. A

lot of effort has been put into creating not only relatable central characters, but also side characters that are likely to become more central to the story as the trilogy continues. Ken Liu has been able to create a fresh and original fantasy story amid the truly cluttered genre. The Grace Of Kings will satisfy fans of both war-like fantasy as well as fans who like some political intrigue in the mix. A triumph in storytelling.

ANDREW MUSK

★★★★★★★★★ 9



BURNING MIDNIGHT

AUTHOR: WILL MCINTOSH / PUBLISHER: MACMILLAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Several years ago, indestructible glass spheres of vibrant hues suddenly appeared all over the world hidden within man-made objects, each colour granting a unique benefit to whoever absorbs its power, such as extra height, better health, clearer memory, greater strength or increased attractiveness. Sully

is a teenage merchant in the spheres, running a stall at a flea market, buying and selling the spheres as one of the few independent traders not run out of business by ruthless billionaire Alex Holliday. Soon after meeting an expert sphere hunter named, er, Hunter (who also happens to be the girl of his dreams), the discovery of two never-before-seen colours make it clear that something has changed and that the underlying mystery behind the sphere's appearance might be revealed.

Burning Midnight is an expansion of McIntosh's short story Midnight Blue, and it shows. It's a great idea and one that presents a number of possible scenarios, but its insubstantial narrative fails to capitalise on them. The story is most engaging in its early stages, as it introduces the various specific colours of the spheres and the myriad of

enhancements each bestows, but after a while it becomes apparent that there isn't a lot more to it. It's marred by a lack of true conflict, with nominal antagonist Holliday only making brief appearances, during which he comes off more like a hissing pantomime villain than a credible threat.

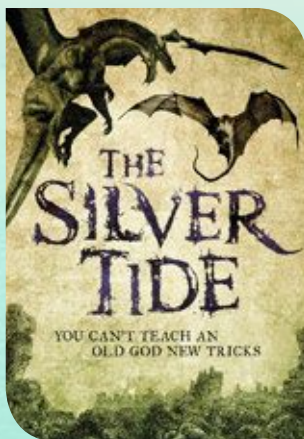
To its credit, McIntosh credibly creates a world where the phenomenon of the spheres is integrated into ordinary life, becoming a significant part of the everyday without dominating it. An entire industry has built up around the buying and selling of spheres, the rarer colours providing proportionally greater benefits and commanding astronomical prices. That Sully's own business barely scrapes by, and the potential failure in the sphere-questing exploits he and Hunter undertake, provides the story with its few consequences

for characters' choices. Hunter herself is a largely taciturn presence, due to an appropriately tragic backstory, and it remains difficult to get a read on her, in particular her growing attraction to Sully. While she never approaches the dreaded MPDG territory, she is still largely defined by what Sully feels for her.

The central premise of Burning Midnight is quite an intriguing one, so it's frustrating that such potential is squandered in a meandering plot that takes too long to actually go anywhere, and when it does, it's far too quick in bringing things to a head and subsequently resolving them. In short, it's a book you'll want to like more, but lacks the substance to allow you to do so.

ANDREW MARSHALL

★★★★★★★★★ 6



THE SILVER TIDE

AUTHOR: JEN WILLIAMS / PUBLISHER: HEADLINE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW (KINDLE)

The Silver Tide is the third and final part of Jen Williams' Copper Cat series, which began with The Copper Promise. The previous two books delivered flat out fun fantasy fiction. Rather than overly long shoe-gazing grimdark misery, Jen's books are filled with magic, dragons, daring duels and all those other things that made us fall in love with fantasy in the first place.

The Silver Tide brings together the core team of heroes from the first book, the Black Feather Three, for one last grand adventure. At this point, the team has hit what surely must be the zenith of their careers. Hard-as-nails gutter-fighter Wydrin has a reputation as an indomitable

adventurer and Lord Frith is still the greatest (and possibly only) magus in all the land. Their friend and human siege weapon, Sebastian, is the only one who is miserable, for reasons that will be predictable to regular readers of the series.

The call to adventure comes in the form of Wydrin's mother, who happens to be a pirate queen, but the journey they take is far from a tale of piracy. Williams uses this final adventure to take us on a tour on the history of the world, as well as unveiling the secrets behind the long-dead gods that form the backbone of the setting.

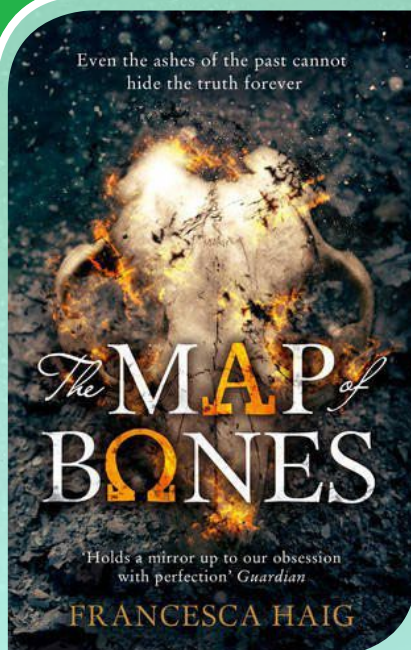
The result is more action, more adventure, more unlikely rescues, and more fun. The Silver Tide does everything

you expect the end of a series to do; it ties off existing storylines in a sufficient (if not entirely neat) way, whilst delivering the same sort of action the reader expects. It complements the preceding books, bringing previous character development and world building into sharp focus, and the result is very, very satisfying.

As usual, style is quick-paced and clear, with plenty of stopping off points for the busy commuter. We heartily advise that you start from the beginning, with The Copper Promise, but as the entire series is a delight.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★ 10



THE MAP OF BONES (FIRE SERMON 2)

**AUTHOR: FRANCESCA HAIG / PUBLISHER:
HARPER VOYAGER / RELEASE DATE: APRIL 7TH**

The Map of Bones is the sequel to The Fire Sermon, which in this reviewer's opinion, was the finest fantasy novel of 2015. If you haven't read The Fire Sermon yet, you should. And then you should read The Map of Bones because,

if possible, it is even better.

How much can we tell you without giving anything away? Centuries ago, an apocalyptic explosion laid waste to the world. Now what's left of humanity is divided between the privileged, physically perfect Alphas and their mutant twins, the Omegas, who are branded and forced to live as outcasts, struggling to survive in the ruined wilderness. But no matter how much they despise their Omega siblings, the Alphas still need to keep them alive – a fatal bond between twins means that when one of them dies, so will the other.

This is the continuing story of Cass, an Omega-seer, whose psychic abilities make her feared and mistrusted even by her own kind. Cass is still struggling to make sense of what she discovered at the end of The Fire Sermon, and the awful tragedy that unfolded. Her dreams of the blast that consumed the world in fire are growing stronger, and she knows – because of what happened to other seers before her – that madness cannot be far behind. But she still has to stop her Alpha twin, the cruel tyrant called The Reformer, from completing his mission to wipe every Omega off the surface of the world and imprison them in the not-dead-but-not-alive nightmare of the tanks, safely out of sight and mind, allowing the Alphas to rule supreme. Yet, not even Cass can foretell how far The Reformer will go to make that happen. He has unearthed a terrifying secret from 'the Before' that could destroy everything, all over again.

In her quest to stop The Reformer, Cass must confront the past as well as the future. She must learn to become a

warrior, and she must attempt a dangerous alliance with one of the Omega's deadliest enemies. She will see many people killed, she will be confronted by horrors she cannot even imagine (there is a scene at the mid-point of the book that is as terrifying as it is heartbreaking), and she will learn that, despite what her visions may tell her, not everything is as it seems. The tension runs high, the odds for success are always against her, and all Cass and her closest allies, Piper and Zoe, can rely upon are their collective courage, resourcefulness, and hope. And hope can easily be crushed, even at the final moment.

The Map of Bones is a wonderful book – thrilling, emotionally engaging, booby-trapped with some incredibly inventive twists and turns and some excellent action sequences and, from beginning to end, it is intensely moving. Like its predecessor, this is a story that forces us to consider what it means to be human, and how important it is to respect the humanity in others. Francesca Haig's writing is exquisite, loaded with turns of phrase and lines of dialogue that are so perfect and so beautifully realised, it reminds us how powerful the written word can be. And, on top of all that, it is – along with The Fire Sermon – the most exciting and rewarding novel we have read in a very very long time. You have got to read these books, they are storytelling at its absolute finest.

IAN WHITE

★★★★★★★★★10



THE IMMORTALS

**AUTHOR: JORDANNA MAX BRODSKY /
PUBLISHER: ORBIT / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

Present day. New York City. Private Investigator Selene DiSilva discovers the mutilated body of Helen Emerson early one morning on the banks of the Hudson.

Extracted genitals, coupled with mythological paraphernalia, do not an ordinary murder make, but then DiSilva is no ordinary investigator. She is Artemis, the Greek goddess known as the Huntress, forced to live amongst the mortals since her father Zeus cast the gods from Olympus thousands of years ago.

Artemis' first suspect is Professor Theo Schultz, a young, academically brilliant scholar with a tendency to talk himself into trouble. Schultz is innocent but has secrets of his own. Helen was Schultz's ex-girlfriend and is the current fiancée of his good colleague, a fact that didn't prevent Theo from spending the night with her a few weeks before she died. Fuelled by guilt, he promises Helen's fiancé that he will bring her killer to justice, and thus casts himself in a sidekick role, as Artemis begins her investigations.

As bow-wielding heroines go, it would be easy to compare Artemis to Katniss Everdeen, but weapon of choice aside, that's where the similarities end. Whereas Everdeen was a reluctant hero, Artemis is resolute in her convictions. Faced with an ailing mother, conflict with her estranged brother Apollo, and the cold reality of an existence without affection (that's what an ancient wish to keep your god-like virginity will do, folks) she remains committed to her cause regardless of the personal cost. In contrast, the interminably likeable Theo

lurches from one disaster to the next as he is hounded by the police, shunned by his employers and denounced by the media as the 'Pervy Professor'.

Brodsky carefully introduces supporting players as the plot unfolds, crafting each new character with a well-observed personality that never detracts from the pace of the narrative. The story itself hurtles through twists and turns, skilfully interweaving Artemis' history as The Huntress, with a rising body count that builds towards a thrilling third act.

Brodsky is clearly having a ball exploring the history of the gods, revelling in their Olympian monikers whilst characterising their present-day aliases in a fun, colourful way. The novel's true masterstroke, however, is the way that it refuses to be weighed down by complicated mythology; the flashbacks to Artemis' former life only serve to enhance the richness of the tale often providing an explanation to her steely demeanour without lapsing into melodrama.

The concept of ancient gods walking amongst us isn't a unique idea in the fantasy genre, but this is a bold and entertaining début, which neatly edges Thor to one side, as The Huntress firmly takes her place as the new god in town.

TOMMY JAMES

★★★★★★★★★9



JAMES BOND: THE SECRET HISTORY

AUTHOR: SEAN EGAN / PUBLISHER: JOHN BLAKE PUBLISHING / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The fact that anyone can find anything new to say about the James Bond franchise is commendable. The fact that they can say it as well as Sean Egan does in *James Bond: The Secret History* and make even the well-trodden 007 trivia that we're so familiar with sound fresh and

exciting is something to be celebrated.

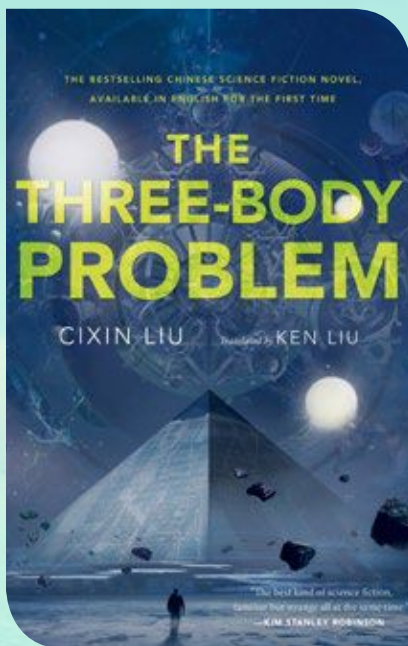
This is a book for Bond fans everywhere – an extremely well-researched and snappily written excursion into the universe of the world's favourite secret agent that leaves no avenue unexplored. In his chatty and engrossing style, Egan effectively debunks the popular romantic notion that, when he was serving in the Royal Navy, Ian Fleming was a kind of 'real life' James Bond, examines Fleming's inspirations and Bond's literary beginnings and then interestingly and rather sadly charts the increasing weariness the author felt towards his character. Fleming, by all accounts, hated the process of writing the books and, in a way that was unconsciously mirrored by at least a couple of the actors who would play Bond in the movies (although for different reasons) would deliver each of the later manuscripts to his publisher declaring this one will be the last. Then there are the films and the seemingly endless struggle to keep Bond on the big screen (each release is given a thorough overhaul, as is the famous dispute between the Bond producers and Kevin McClory, who seemingly never missed an opportunity to be a thorn in Broccoli and Saltzman's backside). The comic

books are covered, including a nod to *Dynamite*, the current comic license, as are the video games, and all of the more recent Bond novels (including the Young Bond series), which brings us right up to *SPECTRE* and the growing likelihood that it will be Daniel Craig's last entry in the series. It's also great to see an author give Roger Moore, Timothy Dalton and Pierce Brosnan their due. Moore and Dalton have especially borne the brunt of fan criticism, but Egan is at pains to point out that the series would not be what it is without their input.

We think most Bond fans will agree that there isn't a better time for this book to be released – *SPECTRE*, although a decent 007 outing, fell far short of the benchmark set by *Skyfall* and divided the fans and critics, and what Bond devotees need right now is a little positivity; a reminder not only of what a juggernaut James Bond is and has been, but an injection of hope for the future. 'Today is possibly the most exciting of all times for Bond fans', writes Egan and you know what? On the basis of this fine book, I think he might very well be correct.

IAN WHITE

★★★★★★★★★★ 10



THE THREE-BODY PROBLEM

AUTHOR: CIXIN LIU / TRANSLATOR: KEN LIU / PUBLISHER: HEAD OF ZEUS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

What if everything we know about physics is wrong?

The book opens during the bloody Chinese Cultural Revolution where academics are murdered for being part of the ruling, corrupt bourgeoisie. Similarly, the revolutionaries are also

horribly killed, their mutilated bodies serving as warnings to others. Student Ye Wenjie watches as her brainwashed revolutionary mother calls for the brutal, public execution of her physicist father and is stunned into silence and a quiet determination to make the world a better place. Later, young and naive, she is set up as a subversive after a copy of call-to-environmental-action book *Silent Spring* is found under her pillow. She is sent to work on a secret military project on the mountain side, where trees are dying around the site.

From this opening, the book skips forward several decades to a series of unexplained suicides of brilliant scientists – one of whom includes Ye Wenjie's adult daughter Yang Dong. This issue pulls in nanotech engineer Wang Miao, who reluctantly, but quickly, becomes embroiled in something bigger than a crime case – one that seems to rest on a mysterious computer game, *The Three Body Problem*.

The three-body problem is the actual science that underpins the book: this is concerned with the orbits of a planet, its satellite, and a star, and the effect that a physical force (gravity) has on the velocity and movement of these bodies. This is translated into a popular, complex virtual reality game that has garnered a cult following across the world. Those who complete the seemingly impossible first level are invited to secret meetings with others who have mastered the game. Wang Miao is drawn into this group, spending hours on perfecting his technique,

although remaining a sceptical player.

However, the purpose of the game is darker than it seems, as Wang Miao discovers during his immersion into the game. He is thrust into a shady conspiracy where he is unsure who to trust and no one is what, or who, they seem; from ageing scientist Ye Wenjie with her turbulent, tragic past, to plain-talking, idiosyncratic 'tough, no nonsense' cop Da Shi. Mirroring the opening of the novel, factions have begun to form and Wang Miao has to choose which side he is on.

The novel is ambitious – culturally, geographically, and temporally – and it posits questions on scientific and spiritual dogma while preparing the ground for an event that will change the world. It's a stunning, high-concept, rollercoaster of a novel which offers an intriguing Eastern perspective and a truly 21st century take on immersive virtual reality games.

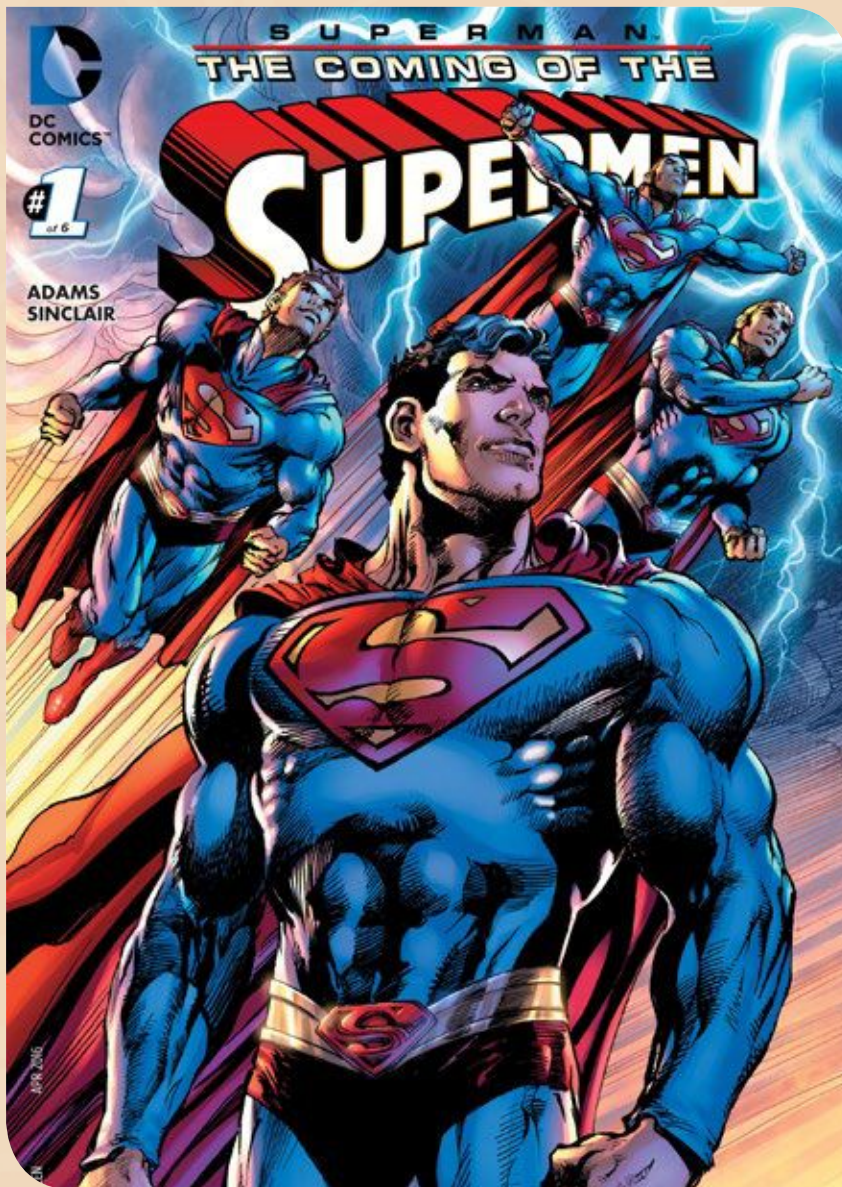
Nominated for the Nebula Award in 2014 and winner of 'Best Novel' in this year's prestigious Hugo Awards, *The Three Body Problem* is the first book in the *Remembrance of Earth's Past* trilogy. The *Dark Forest* – the second translated book – is out now, and the third – *Death's End* – is out early next year with a film due to be released in July 2016. This is a trilogy which, like Asimov's *Foundation* epic, looks set to quickly become an essential science fiction classic.

JENNIE BAILEY

★★★★★★★★★★ 9

VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER

JOEL HARLEY PULLS
MONITOR DUTY
TO BRING YOU THE
LATEST FROM
THE WORLD OF
COMIC BOOKS



New 52 hit. As for everything else? It's to be cancelled or relaunched, staggered throughout the year.

Rebirth will begin in June, carrying on during the course of 2016. What all this entails exactly still remains to be seen. Will the last five years be completely wiped from the record, or will there be some integration for the good stuff? Lest we forget the brilliance of Scott Snyder's *Batman*, *Swamp Thing*, or *Gotham Academy*, for example. One can't imagine DC wiping the slate clean entirely (and nor should we wish them to) but it'll be interesting to see how this *Rebirth* plays out, nevertheless.

But first: comics legend Neal Adams is bringing us not one or two, but *three* Supermen in the six-issue miniseries *Superman: Coming of the Supermen*. In keeping with the 'return of the red briefs' theme, it's promised as a classic take on the Man of Steel, starring the usual line-up of Superman (no, duh!), Lois and Luthor, in addition to something more Kryptonian and – with Apokolips and the New Gods apparently making an appearance too – Kirby-esque. The other Supermen? We'll have to wait and see, although Adams hasn't been too shy in sharing the facts online, if you're so impatient. *The Coming of the Supermen* is out now. One can only hope that it's as brilliantly nuts as his *Batman: Odyssey*.

Say, did you hear? There's a crazed but charismatic monster running for the Oval Office! What? No, not Donald Trump, I said *charismatic*. We're over at Marvel Comics, who are asking you to vote for Loki as President come election time. Scant details have been released for a new series called *Vote Loki*, scheduled to debut in June. I mean, I'm not sure about his Thor-killing policy, but I do approve of his Malekith-killing policy (joke ripped from *The Simpsons*). Better than the Drumpf though... probably.

As fictional comic book Presidents go you might be better off with Prez, who is set to return for DC's *Rebirth*, if writer Mark Russell and his Twitter account are to be believed. Well, he could hardly do any worse...

We heard, last month, that young Steve Rogers was back in the red, white and blue as (a) Captain America. He's not the only one returned! Fan favourite Joss Whedon will be writing the character in celebration of Cap's 75th anniversary. Due March 30th, *Captain America: Sam Wilson #7* is a story that celebrates 'the legacy and legend of Captain America.' Reports say that Whedon's tale will be one of three stories in the book, one of which will presumably be a

Well, they gave it a good shot. It's a maxim often repeated (by me, in this column) that much of mainstream comics is a cyclical thing. None of your favourite heroes (or villains) will stay dead; those retired will inevitably return, and old Steve Rogers is, of course, not going to stay old forever. Enter DC Comics' *Rebirth*, in which the bell finally tolls for The New 52.

We've seen signs for months now – the return of old, loved-up Lois and Clark, red trunks and all; rumours that the DC

Universe of old may not be as lost as we had once feared. And so, DC has announced their *Rebirth*: a reboot of their entire line. However, unlike last time, in which it wiped out much of the characters' histories and legacies, this one could well restore the status quo all the way back to 2011. Instead of picking up again at number 1, the line's longest-running titles *Action Comics* and *Detective Comics* will resume their numbering with #957 and #934, respectively, back as they were before the



continuation of the regular storyline.

Outside of the Big Two – Dan Abnett is taking a break from his *Guardians of the Galaxy*, heading to a bleaker part of a different universe to write *Predator: Life and Death*, part of a massive crossover that eventually promises to tie together *Alien*, *Predator*, and *Prometheus* in one bigger narrative. In *Life and Death*, the Predator will face off against a team of Colonial Marines aboard a crashed Engineers ship.

Just in time for his eventual appearance on *The Walking Dead* Season Six, Image Comics will be shedding some light on the earlier days of Negan, giving the potty-mouthed baseball bat-wielding villain his very own prequel. It won't be in the pages of *The Walking Dead* though – no, the story will be serialised in their new advertorial-type trade magazine *Image +*. In addition to previews and trade insight, *Image +* will publish the *Walking Dead* prequel across 12

issues, four pages at a time. *Image +* will be published from May onwards, drip-feeding droplets of Negan with it.

Stressed with all that talk of Donald Drumpf and sparse Negan exploitation intended to shift dull trade magazines? Why not unwind with a little adult colouring. Very adult, in this case. From Todd McFarlane and Image comes the *Spawn Adult Colouring Book*, featuring 47 pages of Spawn artwork in need of colouring. *Spawn Adult Colouring Book* is due this April. Unless, you know, it's an elaborate prank, which is always a possibility.

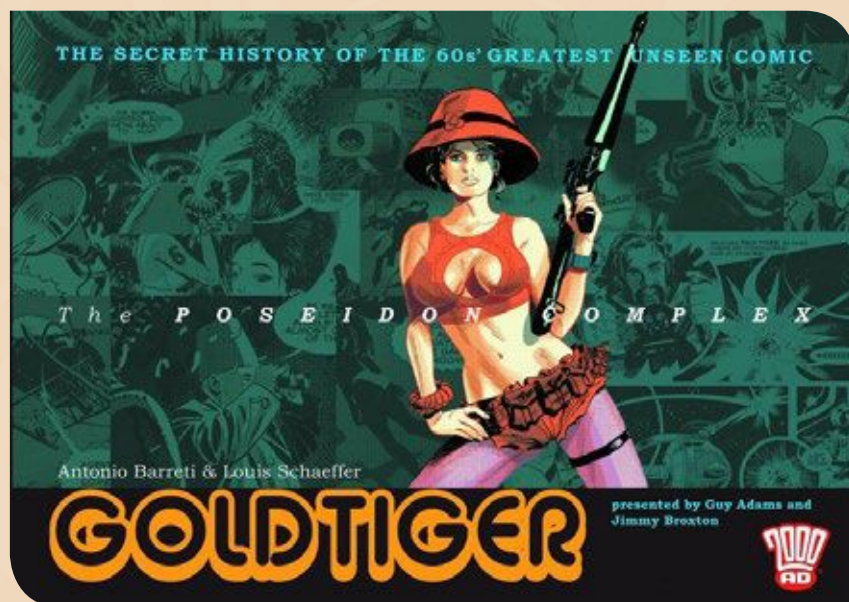
And so we wrap up another month's **View from the Watchtower**. Hit me up below should you wish to share which Old 52 favourites you'll miss... or not.

Joel Harley can be contacted at:
joel.harley@starburstmagazine.com
 and tweeted @joelharley



REVIEWS

THE LATEST COMIC
BOOK RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



GOLDTIGER

AUTHOR: GUY ADAMS / ARTIST: JIMMY BROXTON / PUBLISHER: 2000 AD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Remember Goldtiger? In the 1960s, this newspaper serial from writer Louis Schaeffer and artist Antonio Barreti gained a firm cult following, though never achieved the popularity of its better-known competitor Modesty Blaise. Creative differences between all involved meant it was cut short, leading to Barreti suffering a mental breakdown. The artist's later attempt to re-imagine the strip as a sci-fi epic was rejected by 2000 AD, and his attempts to publish Goldtiger 2000 elsewhere were no more successful.

Of course, none of that really happened – in this new book from Guy Adams and Jimmy Broxton, the grumpy Schaeffer and egotistical Barreti are as much a part of the fiction as fashion designers-cum-mercenaries Lily Gold and Jack Tiger. The book presents *The Poseidon Complex*, a serial in which Lily and Jack follow a trail of disappearing boats, leading them into conflict with a crocodile-skinned supervillain who's developing a laser that turns objects into liquid. Around this strip, it provides us with a meta-story following the chaos behind the scenes of Goldtiger, incorporating letters, interview transcripts, and various other historical documents into the plot.

The strip itself is a kitschy period adventure, in which both Adams'

sensational writing and Broxton's simple but lurid art capture the tropes of the source material perfectly; though unsophisticated compared to the comics of today, it'll provide nostalgic glee to those familiar with the genre.

Goldtiger really shines, however, in the meta-story, simultaneously a hilarious

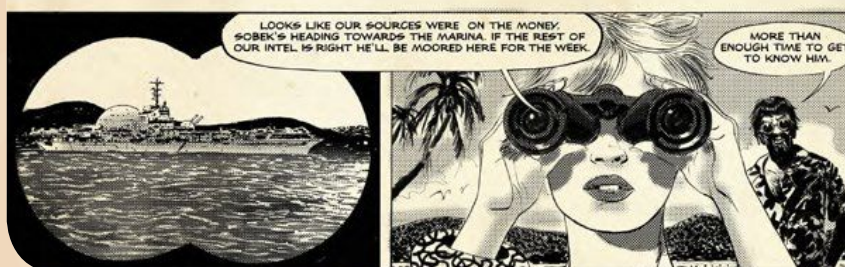
mocking of '60s attitudes and a character study of two highly flawed artists. As the glimpses into Schaeffer and Barreti's lives build up, we get a picture of why they were such a bad fit for each other; a radio interview with Schaeffer sees him annoyed at having to talk about Goldtiger, while letters between Barreti and the 2000 AD editors show his arrogant assertion that the strip is his great masterpiece.

The book's two strands – *The Poseidon Complex* and the behind-the-scenes material – intertwine very cleverly. At one point, Barreti draws himself into the strip, explaining directly to its readers how he's skipped a slow, boring section of Schaeffer's script. Schaeffer attempted to regain control, the meta-story tells us, by sketching out later scenes himself, at which Barreti threw a hissy fit and sent off the writer's sketches as the finished product, leaving the strip amusingly messy.

Goldtiger is a fantastically presented volume, with its collection of documents convincing enough to trick you into thinking this excruciatingly catastrophic creative collaboration is all too real. Using the framing device of a lovingly constructed pastiche of a '60s serial, Adams and Broxton have brought us one of the most original and fascinating comics volumes of 2016 so far.

KIERON MOORE

★★★★★★★★★ 9





SKY DOLL DECADE VOL. 1

AUTHOR & ARTIST: ALESSANDRO BARBUCCI, BARBARA CANEPA / PUBLISHER: TITAN COMICS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Sky Doll is an Italian comic series that was first published in 2000. Sky Doll Decade is the collected works of the series from 2000-2010, a translation of the original series. This collection brings together three of the original stories from the Sky Doll series. It also features the prequel Doll's Factory, as well as a

separate story called Heaven Dolls.

The first three volumes in the collection are The Yellow City, Aqua and The White City. The series follows the story of Noa, a Sky Doll with an unusual personality who seems connected with the religious Agape. The action takes place in the backdrop of a large conflict: the religious Agape has been banished, which has resulted in Lodovica coming into power and controlling the galaxy. Noa, an android who serves the states desires, becomes entangled on a mission to destabilize the Agape followers. However, as the series progresses we see that Noa is not just an ordinary Sky Doll.

The prequel, Doll's Factory, shows the creation of Noa, whilst Heaven Doll focuses on Sky Dolls in general. This series has become increasingly popular in the 15 years since its creation. Titan Comics is allowing English fans a great jumping-on point to the series, with a decades worth of Sky Doll stories in one collection. The popularity of the series can be seen in the 'Homages' section of the collection, which shows artistic tributes to the series.

This volume collects all the essential content from the first ten years of the series in a deluxe hardback format, allowing new fans to enjoy the series, whilst giving existing fans the chance to obtain the series in a deluxe set. The story is very original and highly entertaining, whilst the artwork is

stunning. The transition between each volume contains full pages of the Sky Dolls and is truly beautiful. Titan Comics has yet again found a great comic series; a sci-fi title full of emotional entanglements, religious conflicts and the exploration of love; an entertaining fun adventure series.

ANDREW MUSK

★★★★★★★★★ 9



PLANET OF THE DAMNED & DEATH PLANET

AUTHOR: PAT MILLS, ALAN HEBDEN / ARTIST: VARIOUS / PUBLISHER: 2000 AD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Two classic British comics from 1978 are reprinted for the first time in this volume from Rebellion – Planet of the Damned, originally serialised in the first ten issues of Starlord, and Death Planet, from 2000 AD.

Planet of the Damned, initially scripted by Pat Mills before Alan Hebden took over under the pseudonym R. E. Wright

(geddit?), gives a sci-fi take on the mystery of the Bermuda Triangle – a passenger jet falls through a rift in space to end up on the same remote planet, where all the Triangle's other victims are stranded. They face off with an American fighter crew and a beached Nazi submarine, as well as the native 'Ab-humans', who look either like turds or phalluses, depending on which of the strip's several artists is drawing them.

The story resorts to a lot of clichés and the dialogue drops any subtlety in favour of everyone spouting exposition – immediately after landing, a passenger who happens to be a sci-fi writer comes to the conclusion that they've arrived on a "co-existent world in another dimension" without even blinking. The most groanworthy element is the fact that female characters only ever show up a couple of panels before they're killed horribly – though, to his credit, Hebden expresses regret at this in his introduction to the book.

Despite its flaws, there's enjoyment to be found in Planet of the Damned's bombastic adventure – the pace with which it throws its characters into an unbelievable amount of weird and wonderful situations makes it an entertaining enough diversion.

Death Planet, entirely written by Hebden and illustrated by César López Vera, is very similar in style, albeit more consistent and with slightly stronger characters. It sees a spaceship full of human colonists crash on a planet full of dangerously extreme climates – and from the title, you can guess

what happens.

The story revolves around the conflict between spaceship captain Lorna Varn and chief colonist Richard Cory, whose ruthless approach to survival contrasts with her idealism. Varn was 2000 AD's first female lead character, which represents some kind of step up from Planet of the Damned, even if she does screw up and require rescuing a few too many times – comedically falling off an alien kangaroo is the low point for this supposed 'ace spacer'.

Nevertheless, Death Planet is another slice of classic sci-fi, with a wide and imaginative variety of creatures and obstacles placed in the path of the desperate heroes. This volume is perhaps not for those who've grown up with the more sophisticated comics of today, but will provide a fun blast from the past for retro 2000 AD fans.

KIERON MOORE

★★★★★★★★★ 6



人造人 ELECTRIC MEMORY MAN:PLUS ANDRÉ LIMA ARAÚJO



MAN: PLUS #2

AUTHOR & ARTIST: ANDRÉ LIMA ARAÚJO /
PUBLISHER: TITAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

A malfunctioning android is on the loose on the streets of Olissipo City, 2042, and it's a race between a crack police squad and a gang of armed cyborgs to catch up with it. With its main characters in place, this second issue of André Lima Araújo's comic hits the ground running, giving us some tense action while expanding its world.

As the Special Operations Force investigate both the android and the gang, we get to know some of the team members a bit more, particularly the cynical Rodrigo and the confident young Josu, as they meet with an informant. But Man:Plus isn't the kind of comic that slows down for long, as they've soon got their hands full with a major conspiracy.

This is the issue in which the lines between law and criminality start to blur, as the criminals are linked to a well-known businessman and the cops gather information from the shadiest of informants – and from the downbeat tone of this comic's world, the morality can only get murkier. Some of the plot elements, such as the corporate conspiracy, don't seem the most original, and some of the heroes are still lacking definition, but there are hints at intriguing twists to come – this issue will leave you eager to find out exactly what the relationship between the fugitive android and the gang's victimised techie is.

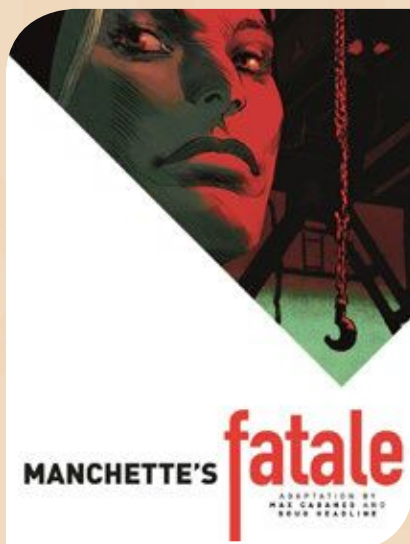
But the real appeal of Man:Plus #2, as with the first issue, is the depth of the world. The disparity between the rich and the poor is extended even further here, with a brief glimpse into the life of the wealthiest man in Olissipo. Meanwhile, a visit to the city's Chinatown offers another stunningly wonderful combination of world cultures and future technology.

As it moves forward, we're really enjoying this futuristic techno-thriller – while some characters can come across

as a little simplistic, it has a whole load of interesting ideas and details thrown into its world, and, with shades of Blade Runner and Akira in its visual style, is always a joy to look at.

KIERON MOORE

★★★★★★★ 7



MANCHETTE'S FATALE

AUTHORS: DOUG HEADLINE (ADAPTED FROM
JOHN-PATRICK MANCHETTE) / ARTISTS: MAX
CABANES / PUBLISHER: TITAN / RELEASE
DATE: OUT NOW

Jean-Patrick Manchette was a popular French crime novelist known for his many works that rejuvenated the genre. One of his best-known novels is Fatale, a noir crime novel. This graphic novel adaption was published in French in 2014. Now,

Titan Comics has collected the graphic novel into an English translation. It's great to see crime novels being adapted into sequential art, allowing a wider audience to read the story in a different format.

This adaption has kept the gritty feel of the novel and expanded the use of the characters. The story follows Aimée Joubert, who we are introduced to in a shocking way. From there, we follow the character to Bléville. Once there, the reader gets to see two sides to her personality. Whilst in public, we see her as an ordinary civilian with a hidden vendetta, behind closed doors, the reader sees the creepy and bizarre nature of the character, as we follow Aimée Joubert through her acts of betrayal and lies.

Readers should expect art of bleak scenery, which manages to capture the overall tone of the novel. The most intriguing part of this interpretation is Aimée Joubert. She is a cynical character, who keeps the whole story together. They will also be eager to discover her true motives, as she becomes entangled in people's lives, forming alliances for an unknown agenda.

The adaptation is true to the novel, giving comic readers to have a gritty and hard-hitting crime story to enjoy. However, it may seem slow to some readers; it is by no means a fast-paced story. Instead, it focuses on the characters, enabling one to gain an understanding of their personalities,

before shocking the reader with death and destruction. This is a must for comic fans of noir crime fiction, but may have a limited audience.

ANDREW MUSK

★★★★★★★ 7





PAPERCUTS & INKSTAINS #4

AUTHORS: ROB JONES, MIKE SAMBROOK /
ARTISTS: DARREN SMITH, JIM LAVERY, MIKE SMITH / **PUBLISHER:** MADIUS COMICS /
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Madius Comics train keeps on rolling with Papercuts & Inkstains #4 and once again, it's good to be on board. Things feel a little bit different this time, as all three stories have a definite sense of continuity to them, although the cover proclaims that the two newcomers are here for 'tonight only'.

The first story, The Forebearer, is an absolute gem, featuring the barbarian Hogarth, son of Fugazi. It goes beyond tongue in cheek, poking it right through and giving a wiggle; without giving anything away, it's a humorous take on a traditional fantasy quest, presented with a narration that is laugh-out-loud funny. Anyone recognising the source of the character name is in for a treat hunting down further references, while those who don't will still have a great strip to read. The art, by newcomer Darren Smith, is wonderful, bringing so much life to the tale that it feels like the characters are leaping out of the page.

Valkyrie is a Mad Max-style tale of fast cars and violent women, reminiscent of early Tank Girl, although it's far from being a pale imitation. It succeeds in challenging the tropes of the genre, while also simultaneously treating them with affection. Again, the script brings a hefty share of laughs, and Jim Lavery's art adds suitable chaos to the proceedings. Like The Forebearer, there's a hint of more to come and, given that both of these strips have such stunning debuts, it would be a shame for them not to continue.

Profits of Doom – thus far the only ongoing strip – completes the issue, continuing apace as the inept cultists struggle to get rid of the foul creature tearing their town apart. It's as ridiculous as ever, with some one-liners that will have readers laughing or blushing, depending on their disposition, making it a mixture of farce and horror that works superbly. Mike

Smith's artwork has gone from strength to strength on this story, and long may it continue.

All in all, another great package, with the writing double act of Jones and Sambrook ensuring the laughs are plentiful. Continuing from a great 2015, work like this should see the Madius star rise even higher in 2016. There's more than promise on offer here; the talent is incredible and the love and care for their creations is obvious, with the near-trademark wicked humour evident on every page and making this a delight to read.

ALISTER DAVISON

★★★★★★★★★ 9



VANGUARD

AUTHOR & ARTIST & PUBLISHER: DAN BUTCHER / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

This premier volume of Vanguard collects the first five issues of the webcomic of the same name. Created, written, and illustrated by Dan Butcher, it's a good package, starting with a warm introduction by the author, and

finishing with profiles for each of the team members. The story kicks off with a bang, throwing our heroes into a secret mission to rescue a politician's daughter.

In the introduction, Butcher admits his art has improved over the six years that he's been producing Vanguard, and it really shows. In early chapters, characters have muscles on their muscles, while later page layouts are a sublime example of creator growing in both talent and confidence. Even from the beginning, though, there are some superb splash pages featuring London landmarks, and the use of a fictional broadcasting corporation provides a summary of necessary information along with a dose of humour. It's a wit that is interspersed throughout the whole work, whether it is in dialogue or situation, but especially in the mock newspapers and advertisements between issues.

The start of the story is fairly heavy with exposition, as it needs to be, but hopefully this won't put off readers. The action soon gets underway as we, and the team, begin to realise that their secret mission isn't all it seems. By the half-way point, the entire story shifts up a gear, as Butcher's writing gets more assured, coming into its own to show a world taking several turns for the worse. The fifth issue, a spy story sprinkled with the effects of these changes on the personal lives of the team members, is triumphant storytelling, leaving the reader hungry for more, especially after being given tantalising hints of what is to come.

Fortunately, there's plenty more to be had, with a second volume that will feature issues six to nine, hopefully out this year but for those who can't wait, the story can be seen on Butcher's website, which also contains fan art and an insight into its creator. This print volume is a perfect accompaniment to the site, and will hopefully give Butcher's work the further attention it deserves. While it has a somewhat shaky start, Butcher soon finds his own voice in both script and art, offering readers a multi-layered story that is not only packed with action, but also characters that grow and develop as the pages progress.

ALISTER DAVISON

★★★★★★★★★ 8



SPACE ADVENTURE QUEST



CAPTAIN, I BELIEVE
WE'VE ENCOUNTERED A
DYSON SPHERE.



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A MONTHLY
ROUND UP FROM
THE WORLD OF ANIME
AND MANGA BY
LITTLEANIMEBLOG.COM'S
DOMINIC CUTHBERT

ANIME-NATION



New BLACK BUTLER Anime Movie Green-lit for 2017

First teased at the height of last year's Halloween season, it's now been confirmed that the new theatrical anime film based on Yana Toboso's **Black Butler** manga has been green-lit, with Maaya Sakamoto and Daisuke Ono reprising their roles as Earl Ciel Phantomhive and his butler Sebastian respectively. **Black Butler: Book of the Atlantic** will follow the manga's 'Gōka Kyakusen' (or Luxury Liner) arc, which ran in volumes 11-14 as Ciel and Sebastian sailed on the Campania, investigating illegal human experiments in reviving the dead. Toboso herself has created a visual for the movie, helmed by the returning **Black Butler** director Noriaki Abe at A-1 Pictures.

Netflix Plans Simultaneous Release of Production I.G's New Anime in 190 Countries

The latest anime to join Netflix's flourishing roster is the new series from Production I.G, the studio behind **Psycho-Pass** and **Ghost in the Shell**. **Perfect Bones** is set in a future where scientists have attempted to breed the 'perfect human' and will be directed by Kazuto Nakazawa (best known for the ultra-violent anime segment in **Kill Bill**). **Perfect Bones** will be 'the first ever original anime title to debut all episodes simultaneously in 190 countries around the world'.

Michael Pitt Cast as Villain in DreamWorks' GHOST IN THE SHELL

The DreamWorks **Ghost in the Shell** movie has nabbed its baddie, with **Hannibal**'s Michael Pitt joining as the Laughing Man – the super hacker of Stand Alone Complex. Described as 'bitter and vengeful' with a semi-robotic body and sporting a sharp sense of style, he's the enemy opposite Scarlett Johansson's Major Motoko Kusanagi and Pilou Asbæk as Batou. Despite shifting distribution rights from Disney to Paramount, the film retains its March 31st, 2017 release date.

Ghibli Co-founder Scoops Award Ahead of UK Screenings of WHEN MARNIE WAS THERE

After its turn at the Oscars, where it was beaten to the Best Animated Feature punch by **Inside Out**, it's about time Ghibli's **When Marnie Was There** got a UK cinematic release. The limited screenings will begin June 10th. Ghibli's co-founder Isao Takahata, meanwhile, was awarded the Winsor McCay Award for lifetime achievement at the 43rd Annie Awards in February, and turned down an invitation to join the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. He said he was 'too busy at work' to take up the honoured position.

MAGI Spin-off Manga Gets Anime Adaptation

Prepare for more swashbuckling magical antics with Shinobu Ohtaka's characters – an anime of the **Magi** spin-off **Adventure of Sinbad** has been announced. Set thirty years before the main manga, the series starts April 15th, with Daisuke Ono returning as Sinbad from previous OADs.

GUNDAM SEED Head Writer Passes Away

Chiaki Morosawa passed away from an aortic dissection on February 19th, after a career spent dedicated to the beloved **Mobile Suit Gundam** franchise. Best known for writing and supervising the **Gundam Seed** anime series, on which she collaborated with her husband and director Mitsuo Fukuda, she told fans in 2008 that she had a plot in place for a new **Gundam Seed** movie, but sadly, she was too ill following **Gundam Seed Destiny**'s end in 2005 to ever continue with her plans.

Titan Comics to release SHERLOCK manga in English

Titan Comics will be printing an English-language release of the manga adaptation of the BBC series **Sherlock** in the UK and US this June. The manga was created by mangaka Jay for Kadokawa's **Young Ace** magazine back in 2012. The series, which has already been published in a bilingual edition by Kadokawa for Japanese students studying English, begins its publication for English-speaking readers with **Sherlock: A Study in Pink**.



COSPLAY CATWALK

A MONTHLY
FOCUS ON
THE COSTUMED
ROLE-PLAY SCENE AT
FAN CONVENTIONS
AROUND THE WORLD



Fred and Ellen Reed - A Cosplay Love Story. This month, we profile a pair of fans whose love goes much deeper than attraction...

To begin, Ellen Reed sets the scene for us: Every Valentine's Day, I find myself thinking a great deal about iconic fandom couples - Joker and Harley, Pepper and Tony, the Doctor and River, Sherlock and John, Han and Leia, Superman and Wonder Woman, Catwoman and Batman, Aragorn and Arwyn, Peter and Dana (there is no Dana - only Zuul), Sarah and Kyle, Peggy and Steve, Rory and Amy... mostly because Fred and I have to plan our February 14th cosplay. Why? Because our love was founded on a strong foundation of nerdity and embrace of all

things geeky, so the perfect Valentine's Day for us involves cosplay.

Over ten years ago, we both were recently divorced, lonely, and on opposite sides of the Atlantic. Fred was in the UK, I was in Georgia. I spent my evenings in the local gaming store painting *Warhammer* miniatures, Fred spent his days professionally painting figures for international clients. He was a former Games Workshop staff Golden Demon award-winner, and I spent my weekends with the Society for Creative Anachronism in historically-accurate Elizabethan garb

I methodically sewed by hand. We were geeks, once, and young, and serendipity would not rest until we found each other.

Thanks to the owner of the gaming store I frequented, who was also Fred's client, we started chatting online (like a good nerd couple would), met in person, compared book collections, reminisced over D&D games gone awry, fell in love, married, and started making costumes together!

Now, our perfect vacation getaway is a con with a costume contest. Our ideal weekend involves trips to hardware and fabric stores - our love is the perfect intersection of time spent together and time in costume.

With that wonderful set-up, we find out more about their hobby.

STARBURST: How long have you been cosplaying?

Ellen Reed: Together, we have been cosplaying for about eight years. I've been a seamstress for over 25 years with most of my experience coming from historical re-enactment. Fred is a former soldier and master figure painter, which gives him unique perspective on armour, weaponry, and battle damage. Combined, we bring a painstaking attention to detail to our cosplay - we love sharing the stories behind our costumes and invite scrutiny from the most discriminating eye. I am most excited when a cosplay judge peers closely to see the beautifully painted detail my talented husband includes on our costumes. He loves to brag about my custom patterns and happily shows off my seams.

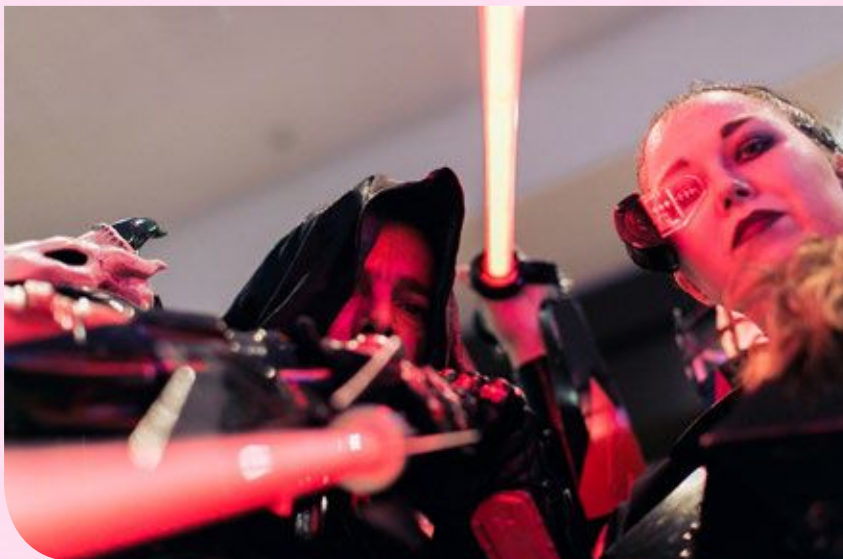
What is your favourite character to dress as?

Oh my! So many to choose from. The nostalgic favourites are those we did early on - Jack Skellington and Sally, or the Doctor and Amy Pond. The characters we are most proud of, though, are those we worked on together, like our Sith Inquisitor and Marauder bodyguard.

Together, we have created Steampunk Bender and Leela, *Adventure Time* Princess Bubblegum and Finn, a Lawkeeper and Castithan from *Defiance*, Bathtime Boba Fett and Princess Leia, the Doctor and River Song, Perseus and Medusa, Mandalorian and Jedi Consular, and many others.

How long do you normally spend making the costumes?

We spend anywhere between three hours and two years! Our Sith costumes have been a labour of love for over a year and continue to be refined and changed each time we wear them. On the other hand, we were invited to a *Star Wars* event on



a Friday and I pulled together a Queen Amidala costume in three hours. Another example: I was able to create a ballroom gown in two hours, but a steampunk bustle skirt took over 40 hours. Fred created Perseus' armour in two evenings, but he spent two days meticulously folding a Pepakura helmet and several subsequent days applying Bondo and sanding it down for his Sith Marauder. Because we have a huge repository of costume foundations, we can pull together cosplay in breakneck speed, but the incredibly detailed and complicated pieces take time and dedication.

For us, part of the fun of cosplaying is the process and we are fortunate to each bring a special skill set to our creations. Here's a snapshot of how we undertake a more complicated cosplay like the Sith:

We started with pencil sketches of our vision for the characters, which led to rough drafts in foam and plastic. Fred designed and engineered the armour and weapons using mixed media such as Pepakura, ABS plastic, EVA foam, and PVC piping; often he found the right solution in the bottom

of a garage drawer or back of a kitchen cabinet. His approach to cosplay creation often mimics Dr Frankenstein - cackles of laughter rise up from the craft room as clouds of plaster dust billow into the house.

My approach, on the other hand, is more systematic and akin to a baker - the preparation and planning often take longer than the physical process itself. I create and design all textile pieces - if a sewing machine is involved, I take the lead. Again, the process begins with sketches that lead to pattern creation and then to meticulous measuring, cutting, sewing, seam-ripping, lacing, buttoning, and finishing.

The first version of our Sith took about 150 hours combined effort. Since that, we've put in around 200 more hours and will continue to refine and update as new visions come to us!

Our next projects include: Steampunk Belle and Lumiere and/or Steampunk *Adventure Time*, Jaime and Cersei from *Game of Thrones*, and a huge project to create power armour from *Starship Troopers*. Fred is currently building a vacuum former to create foundation armour pieces

for cosplayers to build upon, so they can design their own. I'm stalking the perfect bolt of fabric for our GoT project. As always, the process is part of the fun!

In closing, we submit a few notes/bits of advice for those new to cosplay:

- ✦ Seam-ripping is part of the process. Remember, if it's worth doing, it's worth doing right.
- ✦ Apply highlights to your paint details. It makes your work pop and creates visual interest.
- ✦ There is a surprising amount of math in cosplay, specifically geometry, algebra, and fractions. Think of this when pushing through a particularly boring class in school.
- ✦ The details matter - the best cosplays get MORE interesting and beautiful the closer you get.
- ✦ Don't be afraid to cut the fabric or glue pieces together - yes, you'll make mistakes but you'll learn from them. The inverse to this rule: always buy more fabric/plastic/foam than you think you'll need.



✦ Engineer your cosplay for comfort and durability - yes, you can make something elaborate, epic, and big, but if you want to wear it longer than an hour think about how to match form with function. Sub-notes for this note:

- ✦ Ladies, wedges and platforms are your friend. Stilettos look great, but probably aren't worth the agony after two hours.
- ✦ Wear good foundation garments! Protect yourself from your costume, and protect your costume from sweat.
- ✦ Battery-powered fans work great for bulky armour.
- ✦ Even in the most intimate relationships, one should not rely on one's friend for help during bathroom breaks. If you can't go in your cosplay, don't plan to go at all.
- ✦ If you're not having fun from beginning to end, you're not doing it right!

To connect with Fred and Ellen Reed:
[facebook.com/FredandElleDesigns](https://www.facebook.com/FredandElleDesigns)

All photographs credited to: Heather Blackwell, [geekchicphoto.pixieset.com](https://www.geekchicphoto.pixieset.com)

READER'S COSPLAY "HILDAGLITZ"



Credit: Chantelle Smith Photography

Meet Miranda, who cosplays under the name HildaglitZ. When not attending cons in costume, she's a freelance theatrical costumier and performer, something that certainly suits the scene! With some friends, she also has a group that cosplays as characters from *The Lego Movie*.

STARBURST: How long have you been cosplaying?

Miranda: I began cosplaying in 2010, so this year is my 6th anniversary of cosplay! I've always been interested in dressing up and making things, so when my best friend introduced me to cosplay, I was bound to get super into it. When I first started, I would buy clothes from charity shops or Primark and alter them but I soon started experimenting with making my own clothes. In the space of six years, I've gone from barely managing to sew a shoddily made Aperture Science logo to a waistcoat, to being able to construct a fully steel-boned velvet corset with three sets of lacing as well as detailed beading - if that's not improvement, I don't know what is! I am almost entirely self-taught on the sewing/crafting front - years

of trial and error have taught me a lot but there is still a lot to learn!

What is your favourite character to dress as?

At this current moment in time, I love being Emmy Altava from the *Professor Layton* games. She is a character I strongly identify with and I've had so much fun in our little Professor Layton group, doing photoshoots at various iconic London landmarks and laughing at the horrendous amount of in-jokes that our cosplay troupe has. Two other favourites I have are Jade Harley (*Homestuck*) and Wyldstyle (*The Lego Movie*). I played the role of Jade as part of a *Homestuck* Q&A panel back in 2012/2013. I used to cosplay her a lot (for the panel and in general) and I met some of my closest friends during that time, so she will always be very close to my heart. Wyldstyle is one of my favourites because I love my *Lego Movie* group dearly and we've had some amazing times together, one of the highlights being winning Best Overall at the London Super Comic Con Open Masquerade in 2015, as well as performing as face characters at Building Six at the O2. While those are my personal favourites, I love each and every character I cosplay, why am I dressing up as them if not?!

How long do you normally spend making the costumes?

It varies depending on the costume. Some costumes, like Beatrice from *Over the Garden Wall*, took me literally three days to knock together, whereas others, like Princess Yukiko from *Persona 4*, was an ongoing project for many months. Leaving things until the last minute stresses me out greatly and I just don't see the point getting myself wound up about something that is supposed to be fun. Having said that, I'm as much of a procrastinator as the next person so... sometimes last minute hijinks are unavoidable! I try and take my time so that I'm happy and proud of the result.

You can find out more about Miranda at [facebook.com/hildaglitZ](https://www.facebook.com/hildaglitZ) and her *Lego Movie* cosplay group can be found at [facebook.com/madeinbricksburg](https://www.facebook.com/madeinbricksburg).



Credit: Asja Dally



Credit: Asja Dally

Are you a cosplayer and want to see your work featured in STARBURST?

Drop us an email at cosplay@starburstmagazine.com and we'll print our favourites every month

NEWS AND PREVIEWS
IN GAMING
BY LEE PRICE

PIXEL JUICE



Is Crash Making A Return?

He was the unofficial mascot for the PlayStation when the very first console was released way back in the mid-1990s and he gave Naughty Dog their first true push into the limelight, allowing them to develop into the stellar developer that we know and love today. Unfortunately, he hasn't been seen since 2007 and, for all intents and purposes, it appeared that this beloved gaming icon had disappeared from our screens forever.

We are talking, of course, about **Crash Bandicoot**. It has been a long time since we've seen the character make an appearance in a game and even longer since he was in a good game, but he may be making a comeback.

Now, before you get too excited, bear in mind that this is just a very slight rumour at the time of writing. At the 2016 New York Toy Fair, the Director of Development for the toy company NECA made an off-hand remark about Crash: "Looking at some of their other titles, I see that they're bringing Crash Bandicoot back..." It's not much, and there was no follow-up to the comment, but it may be an indication that Sony has some plans we don't know about just yet. Whether or not the series ends up back in the hands of Naughty Dog remains to be seen, but we hope it will as the quality of the **Crash** games tailed off when they stopped making them.

COMING SOON



UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END

PLATFORM: PS4

RELEASE DATE: MAY 10TH

It may have been delayed a time or three already, but it looks like we are finally going to be getting the latest Uncharted game at the beginning of May. With a new writing team behind the series, it will be interesting to see in what direction the story is going to go. Of course, with Naughty Dog handling development duties you can be practically certain that you are going to get a great game here. This is one that many millions of PS4 owners will have been looking forward to for a while.

COMING SOON



DOOM

PLATFORM: MULTI

RELEASE DATE: MAY 13TH

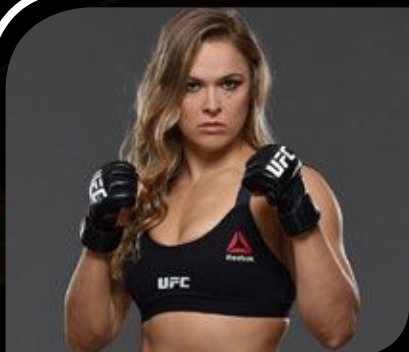
id Software return with what is essentially going to be a reboot of the famous Doom series. Barring a couple of updated versions, we haven't seen much from the series since the brilliant Doom 3, so it will be interesting to see what changes id have made to make Doom more palatable for a modern audience. Interestingly, it looks like the game will actively discourage players from making use of cover or other mechanics that are common in modern FPS games, which should make for a more action-packed experience akin to the Doom games of old.

Warren Spector to Work on SYSTEM SHOCK 3

The announcement of **System Shock 3** was enough to get most people excited, particularly those who had the pleasure of playing the first two games way back when. However, the hype train is only going to gain momentum now as it has been announced that Warren Spector (of **Deus Ex** fame, in addition to the previous **System Shock** games) has been pulled out of retirement to work on the project.

He will take the lead on the new game and appears to be excited about getting his hands dirty as quickly as possible, stating: "Working on **System Shock** was one of the most fulfilling things I've done in my career and it's hard to describe how much I'm looking forward to sharing with players what SHODAN has been up to since the last game was released."

We share the enthusiasm and hope that the game can really live up to the previous entries in the series with Spector back on board.



Rousey Wants To Play Samus

MMA fighting superstar Ronda Rousey is well-known for being something of a geek and gamer, with her love of **Pokémon** and **Dragon Ball Z** in particular being cause for many of her fans to love her just that little bit more.

Her increasing fame from the fight game has allowed Rousey to net a few film roles over the last couple of years and now it looks like she is angling for the part of Samus Aran should Nintendo ever choose to make a movie about their ground-breaking bounty hunter.

While there are no solid plans in place for any sort of **Metroid** movie at the moment - at least that we know of - Nintendo has announced in recent months that they are going to be focusing more of their efforts on film and TV, so it is not outside the realm of possibility. Who better to play the part of the first major female gaming superstar than MMA's first true female crossover superstar?

COMING SOON



SHERLOCK HOLMES: THE DEVIL'S DAUGHTER

PLATFORM: PC, XBOX ONE, PS4
RELEASE DATE: MAY 27TH

The Sherlock Holmes series of games have always been solid, if a little unspectacular, and it's looking like The Devil's Daughter is going to follow that same trend. Expect the usual adventure game tropes to be in play here, with the slow pace allowing for puzzle-solving rather than any major action elements. It should be great for fans of the series and may be worth checking out if you enjoy the sort of games that Telltale make and want something cut from similar cloth.

COMING SOON



BATTLEBORN

PLATFORM: MULTI
RELEASE DATE: MAY 3RD

Gearbox are back with their first original IP since the launch of the Borderlands series so many years ago. Battleborn looks like an interesting title, mixing up standard FPS tropes with a sort of online battle arena to create what promises to be a fairly unique experience. The game will feature 25 playable characters, with more likely to follow through DLC, all of whom have special traits or abilities. It almost sounds like an FPS fighter in many respects so it will be interesting to see what it is like in action.

Kojima Talks New Game

The gaming world is waiting with baited breath to see what Kojima Productions can produce now that they are free of the shackles that the **Metal Gear Solid** series placed on the studio for so long. Early indications from Hideo Kojima himself suggest that his next game is going to be amongst the most ambitious that he has ever attempted, which is saying something pretty impressive given his stellar back catalogue.

When asked if he was going to focus on a strong narrative or spectacular gameplay with his next title, Hideo said both, adding: "I want to do something that gives a lot of freedom and interactivity. Like I did in the past, I want to make something that has a very strong, dramatic story. That's what people want from me and that's what I want to do." Going on to say, "It's risky, because we're just starting up, so it probably would be better to go with something smaller-scale, maybe linear, but Sony is supporting us to make a big game that's edgy with a strong story that gives the player a lot of freedom, with new elements, and I don't know if that's possible. But we'll see."

It looks like we are going to be drip-fed new details of the project over the coming months, but just the fact that Kojima's name is attached to it should be more than enough to get many gamers excited.

HALO's Arbiter to Be in Next Season of KILLER INSTINCT

Rare has experienced something of a revival in recent years thanks to bringing the **Killer Instinct** series back from the dead and releasing seasonal updates to the games.

The third season is on the horizon and it looks like **Halo** fans are going to have something to look forward to as The Arbiter has been announced for the game. Except that it is apparently not The Arbiter that we already know. Instead, the development team are claiming that it will be an amalgamation of historical Arbiters.

That makes no sense, so let's just go with it being The Arbiter for now. There likely isn't going to be all that much of a difference between them anyway.



No ASSASSIN'S CREED in 2016

Ubisoft has shocked the gaming world by actually following through on statements the company made a few years back about how they would not necessarily release a new **Assassin's Creed** every year, by announcing that there will be no mainline game for the series released at all during the course of 2016.

While fans of the series are sure to be disappointed, this is likely to work in favour of Ubisoft, as the series has struggled to adapt to the current generation of consoles, as shown by the disappointing launch of **Unity**, which demonstrated that nowhere near enough time had gone into quality control for the game.

Before that, the series was starting to suffer from more than a little stagnation, so the fact that studio will be stepping away for a while gives them the chance to re-examine **Assassin's Creed** with a new perspective and hopefully come up with some fresh ideas that will make the game as exciting as it was when it first rocked the world of gaming with the release of **Assassin's Creed 2**.

Steam May Start Accepting Bitcoin

While nothing is set in stone at the time of writing, there seems to be some speculation that Steam may soon start accepting Bitcoin as an alternative means of paying for games.

The rumours started circling after some Reddit users noticed a string of commands in Steam's official translation server that seemed to indicate that the company is gearing up for implementing a new payment system. More word on this as it develops.

COMING SOON



MIRROR'S EDGE CATALYST

PLATFORM: MULTI

RELEASE DATE: MAY 26TH

The first **Mirror's Edge** game was released to some fanfare way back in 2008, but patchy execution of its FPS-platforming meant that a lot of people ended up a little disappointed when they got their hands on the game. After nearly eight years it looks like DICE and EA are trying to right the wrongs of the original title and deliver on the potential that it showed with **Catalyst**. They have gone for the open-world design philosophy that is so favoured by modern games, so it will be interesting to see how that affects the way the game plays.

COMING SOON



VALKYRIA CHRONICLES REMASTERED

PLATFORM: PS4

RELEASE DATE: MAY 17TH

The original **Valkyria Chronicles** was one of the earlier hits on the PS3, finding particular favour amongst SEGA fans and people who just enjoy good tactical-RPG action. With a sequel finally on the way, SEGA has finally announced that the remastered version of the game that was released in Japan back in February will get a release in the Western world too. Expect some updated graphics and all of the DLC that was released for the original version of the game.

Nintendo Announce POKÉMON SUN and MOON

The **Pokémon** series shows no signs of going away any time soon, much to the delight of fans, and Nintendo has made the announcement that the next games will be released on the 3DS and named **Sun** and **Moon** respectively.

Few details have been revealed as of yet, though it does appear that this is a new generation of games, rather than a continued expansion of the **X** and **Y** games. All we know for sure is that they are scheduled for release at some point during 'Holiday 2016', which we guess means Christmas.

Shakeup at Mad Catz

Strange things appear to be happening at Mad Catz, which started life as a peripheral company known for the quality of its joysticks before making the transition into publishing, as the CEO and Chairman of the company have both resigned.

Chairman Thomas Brown and President and CEO Darren Richardson both resigned from the company a day before they were due to preside over an earnings call, leading to some speculation about what that call might reveal. The company replaced them quickly, but the company's stock still took a dive in response to the news.

This may be discouraging news for fans of Harmonix's **Rock Band** series, as Mad Catz acted as the publishers for the most recent game. Hopefully all is well at the company.

REVIEWS

THE LATEST
GAMING RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



FAR CRY PRIMAL

DEVELOPER: UBISOFT MONTREAL / PUBLISHER: UBISOFT / PLATFORM: PC, PS4, XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

This should have been another Blood Dragon. No, really, it should have. While that might sound like a negative start to this review, it's really the crux of Primal's main problems. It tries to add new life by shifting the setting, massively altering the landscape and with a wholly new story; the new gimmicks should have been left to a ten-hour standalone experience. That said, it's hard to completely deny the game's merit once you truly start to get into the meat of the story.

Set during the Mesolithic era, you play as a caveman trying to survive in a world of giant carnivorous beasts and hostile tribes. After you're stranded during a hunt and left to face down a rival tribe, you start to learn just how to use these monsters to your advantage, unleashing them upon your foes. While certainly simple, there's an odd charm to the game for its bloody and primitive atmosphere, steeped in mysticism and men speaking complete gibberish. While it certainly goes off the deep end even more than the average Far Cry game, that willingness to embrace this madness makes the whole thing surprisingly endearing.

Much of the game hinges upon your ability to summon and control beasts, thanks to your limited weapons selection. Thankfully, the developers nailed this from the outset and the sheer variety of beasts on offer means you're constantly keeping an eye out for what might turn up next. From tigers to giant wolves and mammoths, you have to search far and wide to find each

and every one, and doing so earns you more than a few great rewards. Don't like one beast in combat? The AI means that no other one will act exactly like them, and will instead be beholden to their quirks and instinctive strengths.

As you would expect from any Far Cry release by this point, the landscapes are truly gorgeous and stretch across a multitude of various biomes. Each has been carefully built up to take advantage of the new systems, especially fire, which you need to help give you a major edge in enemy engagements. While you can't completely rework the entire map, the greater level of interactivity and flashes of brilliance help to keep you engaged. Really, use fire, you wouldn't believe how truly effective a weapon it is in Primal.

Melee combat is an obvious focus over ranged or sniping here, a few tweaks help to keep things somewhat fresh. While it has hardly been completely reworked, the greater variety of stealth takedowns, heavier swings and vastly improved sound and visual assets gives it more depth. Rather than leaving you mashing the same attack key until someone falls, seeing a foe recoil from your blow and timing your attacks in the middle of pitch battles offers a kind of savage joy rarely found outside of Chivalry.

However, the real problem is that there's just not enough content here. As the opening stated, once the gimmick is established, there's little left to help truly build upon things or develop new ideas. In

its place, you're left with the same old dull fetch quests the series has done to death, as well as increasingly grindy tasks to help build your village and radio towers. Well, they're not called radio towers, but they serve the same purpose. As big and as bold as the new environment is, the content is stretched out until you're left with a broad open world with the depth of a puddle.

Matters aren't helped by the disastrous state of the PC port, which turns the lush environments and sweeping landscape into an eyesore. Even beyond the usual DRM issues Ubisoft forces upon gamers, Primal suffers from some astounding performance problems, especially in the frame rate and optimisation departments. Many bugs found on release have yet to be truly fixed and errors are abounding, even in the most central parts of the map.

So, is it ultimately worth it? On PC, definitely not. On console, if you are truly in love with the idea of an open world caveman simulator, then give this one a stab. It has its failings, but there's nothing quite like the same visceral fun of playing through the game as if it were a bloody primordial alternative to Pokémon. If you're already in love with this series, then give Far Cry Primal a chance, but don't expect anything truly revolutionary.

CALLUM SHEPHARD

★★★★★★★ 7



SUPERHOT

DEVELOPER & PUBLISHER: SUPERHOT TEAM / PLATFORM: PC, OS X, LINUX, XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Bullet time has always remained a fascinating visual gimmick, and with good reason. Ever since the striking imagery of *The Matrix* and slick gameplay of *Max Payne* propelled it into the public spotlight, it has become a visual staple. It's a way to add an extra dimension to otherwise very direct fight scenes, but a hard one to truly get right. Overexposure

and mishandling of it in every medium has given it a stigma, but *Superhot* reminds audiences just why this was such a cool concept to begin with. That, and just what the right developer can do when they are given a single core mechanic to work with.

The idea here is simple: Time only moves as fast as you do. Remain still and it's at a snail's pace, turn slightly and

it will inch forwards, run and it's at normal speed. Through this power, you gain the ability to tactically plan out moves, react to foes and emerge victorious from seemingly impossible fights. Not only can you accurately pinpoint the paths of oncoming bullets and avoid them, but you can shoot them out of the air, intercept them with thrown weapons, deck a man and grab his gun while it's falling and nail three foes round a corner. In game time, this takes seconds, but from your warped perspective, minutes of analysis, prediction and planning can play out.

Superhot is effectively an interactive puzzle envisioned via First Person Shooter, and every element of the game respects this. The environments are relatively Spartan; save for foes and anything that can be used as a weapon, the crux of its content lies in its challenges. As the story mode is a mere two hours long, the vast library of challenges are where the real meat can be found and where the bulk of the development obviously went into. Ranging from killing a dozen foes to timed attacks, the challenges,

specifications and variety increases with every level. Yet, in spite of this, the game never loses the feeling of being a truly engaging FPS thanks to its tight controls and intelligent foes.

Unfortunately, while it might use it well, the game's lone concept does begin to wear thin after a few hours. Even expertly handled as it is, you begin to notice a few limitations within the game, such as the limited roster of only five weapons and the self-contained nature of the challenges making them repetitive. There's not much of a sense of evolution, and while a lack of unnecessary features is to be praised, by the end you'll feel as if there could have been so much more to this one.

While it has its flaws and it still seems like a proof of concept above all else, *Superhot* remains an engaging and extremely tactical shooter. You'll easily drop a good ten hours on this one before tiring of it, and if its core mechanic interests you at all, it's well worth grabbing early on.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★★★★★★ 7



TALISMAN: THE HORUS HERESY

DEVELOPER & PUBLISHER: NOMAD GAMES / PLATFORM: PC, OS X, LINUX / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Despite its staunch, dependable fanbase, there's no denying that *Warhammer Fantasy* was always in the shadow of its science fiction counterpart. With stronger book and miniature sales alike, the success of the *Horus Heresy* series, alongside the death of the *Old World*, has only further cemented that fact. Unfortunately, despite trading in its doomswords for plasma guns and bolters, this *Horus Heresy* version isn't the game most fans were hoping for.

While *Talisman* might be a cult classic among board

gaming groups, its systems were extremely flawed. The heavily luck-based RNG, perpetual snowballing of power and a few ridiculous ideas have always stuck in the heads of fans, and were core criticisms of its video game adaptation. None of those issues have been dealt with here; they remain as strong as ever, and a few new ideas serve only to exacerbate its core flaws. Chief among these is the option to ally players, grouping them together into bands of loyalists or traitors, as they fight for control. This would, in theory,

allow for more of a balanced approach or perhaps even new mechanics to combine abilities, but instead it merely means if one player succeeds, so does the other.

You see, *Talisman* itself isn't some new, revamped or reworked idea to take full advantage of its futuristic surroundings. Instead it's, merely the old game with a fresh coat of paint and a few space marines thrown into the mix. While that might sound appealing to certain fans, and there is no denying that the tantalising visuals create a fantastic atmosphere, the overall experience is remarkably shallow. No advantage was truly taken to play upon the storyline of the series, to work the fates of the various primarchs into the game, and the roster is alarmingly limited. Representatives of whole legions are missing, and some are even limited to mere faceless fodder, with generic Praetors put in place of the likes of Typhon or Corswain.

Even the more polished interface is not wholly improved from prior experiences, and remains marred by a

problematic, not to mention convoluted, user interface. As a result, while the random, if somewhat junky, fun is still present in the game, most players will likely be disappointed with a very limited and problematic adaptation of this game. Unless you're the single most devoted *Talisman* fan on the planet, this one ultimately has very little it can offer you.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★★★★★★ 3





AGATHA CHRISTIE: THE ABC MURDERS

DEVELOPER: MICROIDS, ARTEFACTS STUDIOS / PUBLISHER: GRAVITY EUROPE SAS / PLATFORM: PC, OS X, LINUX / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Adapting any kind of famous mystery into a video game is trying at the best of times. The issue always lies in how to keep the story faithful to the original material, while respecting the player's freedom and intelligence. To help combat this issue, Artefacts Studios took things in a very unusual direction, by adapting Poirot to a video game format.

Following one of the more

famous novels, the story sees the Belgian detective combatting a bizarre case of murders directed at him. Challenging letters repeatedly arrive through the post, mocking his abilities and leaving ABC railway guides with each victim.

The story is a classic, and the core essentials of the plot are translated with surprising accuracy. Owing much to the ITV serials, the visual cues,

mannerisms and style are reflected brilliantly in the game's bright cel-shaded aesthetic. This distinct look allows the adaptation to stand out from the often gritty or darker adaptations of late, capturing the lightness of the work. Better yet, the developers opted to reward fans by building a points system based upon how well you reflect Poirot's behaviour through observations, dialogue choices or even the path you walk. This is tied into the clue system, so the more aptly you reflect his personality, the more chances you're given in overcoming the various puzzles. Unfortunately, the problem lies with these puzzles themselves.

What makes Poirot such a difficult character to adapt is that he leaves busywork to the police, which seems to have been ignored here. Right from the start you're tasked with doing most of the physical work in analysing murder scenes, but rather than piecing them together à la Blues and Bullets, these are simple one-shot mini-games. As a result, all too often it can seem like you're doing all the heavy lifting without any deductive work. This is hardly

helped by an extremely uneven difficulty curve; with the game jumping from easy to insanely hard tasks time after time, and the fact the "hint" system completes entire puzzles at a time in your place.

Further problems arise even from the basic presentation, namely the lack of any actual introductions. The developers start without bothering to establish characters or even who is who, which can leave newcomers at a severe disadvantage when it comes to mimicking Poirot himself. However, even older fans will have some trouble with this one, or be infuriated with some of the exceptionally clumsy new exchanges and dialogue, which are meant to point the player in the right direction.

While it certainly has enough here to be casually enjoyed, The ABC Murders is functional but little else. Fans of Frogwares' Sherlock Holmes games may wish to give it a look, but otherwise give this one a pass.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★★★★★★ 4



SHADOWRUN: HONG KONG EXTENDED EDITION

DEVELOPER: HAREBRAINED SCHEMES / PUBLISHER: HAREBRAINED HOLDINGS / PLATFORM: PC, OS X, LINUX / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

There are three things that define Harebrained Schemes in the minds of gamers: their ability to faithfully translate tabletop releases onto PCs, their in-depth high quality writing and their boundless generosity. Shadowrun: Hong Kong Extended Edition has all of these in spades, with plenty of new – completely free – material to reel players back in.

As with Dragonfall - Director's Cut, the story is ultimately unchanged, save for a few key moments. You still play as an outsider forced into a life of crime,

looking to uncover the mystery behind your foster father. The developments instead stem from extra dialogue options and more meaningful non-lethal takedowns, to sidestep certain story points. Instead, what's really going to garner the most attention is the Shadows of Hong Kong bonus campaign, picking up exactly where the core game left off.

As less of an epilogue than a secondary episode unto itself, the campaign offers a welcome change of pace. As opposed to the usual supernatural Armageddon, the

threat you face is terrestrial in nature - focusing upon conflicts between megacorps, rather than beings that could bench press Yog-Sothoth. While magic is certainly present, it's more of a tool than a world-destroying instrument, and the focus is squarely placed upon the stark contrast between the corps and downtrodden civilians. This gradually becomes a theme within the narrative, and serves as a chance to see a different side of the world. This is brilliantly delivered, as much through Harebrained's superlative writing – turning many otherwise pointless side characters into fascinating figures – as the missions. These range from raiding an underwater lab to a full-on military assault, with a number of surprising choices to make.

Yet for all its strengths, Shadowrun's Achilles heel, once again, proves to be its mechanics. While adequate as a turn-based-cover-focused-shooter, it's mechanically unremarkable at its core, even with its diverse variety of races and classes. Many fights treat the player to extremely bullet-spongy foes, and there's always the added frustration of an extremely uneven frame-

rate. Even this might have been acceptable were it not for the long-standing problem of the user interface, with enough gaps and breaks for you to accidentally click the wrong place. If you click just a few pixels off of that special ability you had been intending to use, your glass cannon of a sniper might end up running headlong into the enemy.

Ultimately, the Extended Edition will appeal to players who put story first and mechanics second, and with a world so immersive as this, it's an easy sacrifice to make. If you're interested in the universe at all, there's never been a better time to start than now.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★★★★★★ 7





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RETRO BYTES

A LOOK BACK AT
THE WORLD OF
RETRO GAMING
BY CHRIS JACKSON



your fellow competitors. *F-Zero* wasn't concerned with the usual bland and lifeless grey tracks with the odd tree or billboard floating past, though. This is the year 2560, remember, so we haven't even got regular cars any more... Instead, players choose from one of four super-futuristic hovercars, and race them at breakneck speeds around fifteen tracks split across three increasingly fiendish 'leagues', each with four different difficulty settings.

The first couple of tracks are deceptively easy (and also feature some of the catchiest videogame music of all time - Google 'Mute City I' or 'Big Blue' and see how long they stay in your brain), but things soon get tricky halfway through the first 'league'. There are some viciously devious twists and turns to contend with, as well as other hazards such as dirt pits, landmines, and exploding opponents... Each car has its own energy meter that runs down on contact with walls or other racers, but it can be replenished by driving over power strips located at various points around each track. Each completed lap earns you a single speed boost which can be used at any point during the race, with the potential to store up to three boosts in case you feel like you might need a bit of a hand during a particularly nail-biting final lap. It's not a 'get out of jail free' card by any means, though, as the game zips along at a fairly chaotic pace and too much speed can easily send your hovercar flying off the track and turning into a

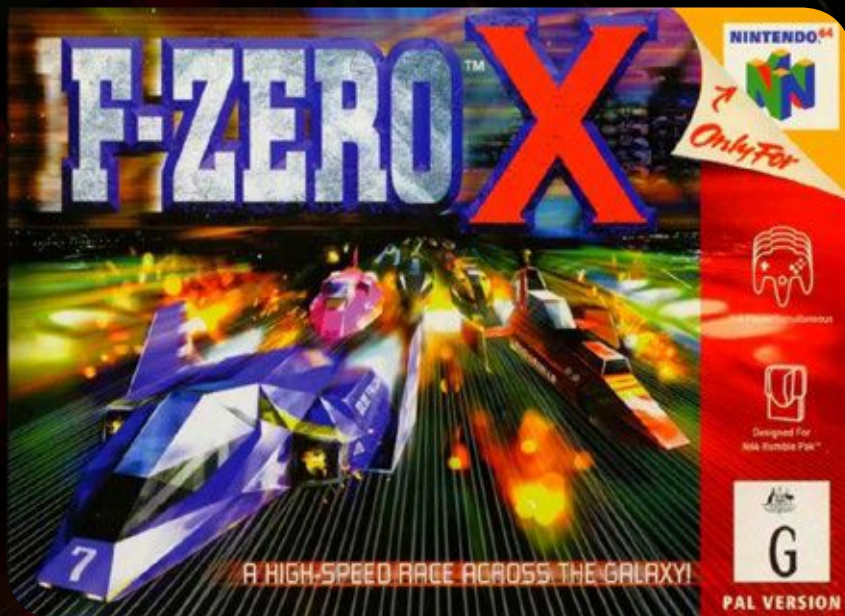
RETRO RACING

We've not really covered any racing games in *Retro Bytes* until now, mainly because there seems to be a general feeling that if you've played one racing game, you might as well have played them all. The silly/fun end of the market is pretty much covered by the hundreds of *Mario Kart* titles that have been released over the years, and then you've got *Forza* taking care of business on the more serious side of things. But resting in those murky waters somewhere between silly and serious is one of the greatest racing series ever created: *F-Zero*.

The original *F-Zero* was released on the same day as the Super Nintendo console, hitting Japan in late 1990 and eventually making its way to European shores in April 1992. Set in the year 2560, *F-Zero* turned the racing genre on its head by creating a huge futuristic world filled with bright neon backgrounds that really put players right in the middle of the action thanks to the Super Nintendo's 'Mode 7' feature. This was a graphical enhancement that gave programmers the ability to scale and rotate the background layers of their games, creating a variety of different effects such as an almost-lifelike (for the time, at least) 3D sensation. It's safe to say that this innovative use of cutting edge programming technology

truly blew people's minds in the early '90s; bringing unbelievable graphical touches that had never been seen on home consoles before.

As with all racing games, your objective is to cross the finish line before any of



futuristic fireball.

The SNES version of *F-Zero* breathed new life into what was, back then, a pretty tired genre, and fans welcomed this change with open arms, praising the game's graphics, speed, creative tracks, and obstacles, and unbelievably good soundtrack. In fact, the music was so popular that an album of jazz cover versions was released in 1992. These days we're used to that sort of thing (some games are even sold with soundtracks bundled into their 'special editions'), but 25 years ago, this was almost unheard of.

Nintendo realised they were onto a winner, and further instalments were released in the mid-'90s via the Japanese Super Famicom's Satellaview add-on subscription service. Western gamers had to wait a little while longer for a sequel, but it was worth the wait as *F-Zero X* arrived in 1998 and more than lived up to expectations.

Released on the more powerful N64, *F-Zero X* was everything fans of the original had hoped for. With a total of 30 different cars available, each with their own unique speed and handling statistics, and 24 tracks split across four racing leagues, 'X' was vastly bigger than its predecessor. It was faster too, as boosts were no longer limited to one use per lap. Instead, they could be used completely at will; although the extra speed drains your car's energy meter, so it's up to you whether you want to take the risk...

Nintendo didn't stop at merely adding a few extra tracks and calling it a sequel, though. Also included here are a time trial mode where players can race to beat their best times, a stress-free practice mode, a VS Battle for 2-4 players, and a brand new 'Death Race' feature where the idea is to annihilate the opposition as quickly as possible using special spin attack moves to deplete their energy meters or ram them off the track.

In addition to this, a huge ace up



F-Zero X's sleeve was the fact that the N64 was capable of true 3D gameplay, adding further wonder and amazement to the overall package. Racing at such incredible speeds against 29 other competitors placed a fair bit of a strain on the N64's processing power, though, a result being the slightly toned-down graphics and sound compared to its SNES counterpart.

Considering the enormous amount of content on offer, plain-looking tracks were the only minor complaint for most gamers. The 3D capabilities of the N64 meant that tracks could now feature loop-the-loops, as well as upside down sections, hills, tunnels, and pipes, taking players through a mind-bending assortment of courses beyond their wildest dreams! On top of all these improvements, completing the most difficult set of tracks ('Joker Cup', featuring a pretty faithful reproduction of *Mario Kart*'s 'Rainbow Road' as its opening track) unlocked something known as the 'X Cup', which boasted completely different randomly generated tracks every time this mode was selected. As far as sequels go, *F-Zero X* is pretty much faultless.

After 'X', the next title in the series was an expansion pack for the ill-fated 64DD add-on. Released exclusively in Japan, the imaginatively named *F-Zero X Expansion Kit* included new tracks, new music, as well as a track and vehicle editor. We've never actually had a go on this one, but if anyone's feeling generous and would like to supply us with a 64DD please do get in touch ASAP!

Next there, was a return to the SNES style of gameplay, with the release of *Maximum Velocity* on the Game Boy Advance in 2001. It's another standout title, but with little to set it apart from either of the previous iterations, so we're not going to spend too much time on it. There was also a 2003 GBA release known as *GP Legend*, and both titles are definitely worth picking up if you enjoy a bit of handheld racing action though!

As well as *GP Legend*, 2003 also saw the arrival of *F-Zero GX* on the GameCube, which for our money is the ultimate *F-Zero* experience. Thanks to the GameCube's

extra power, *GX* features massively souped-up graphics and sound compared to the N64 edition, and there are also a few extra bells and whistles that really add to the whole experience. The main gameplay is exactly the same as the N64 version, but it's all just so much smoother and more satisfying. And if we thought 'X' was fast, this one's just *insane*. At times it feels almost impossible to keep up with what's happening on the screen, such as during the massively disorientating 'Green Plant: Intersection' course with its tubular rollercoaster-like twists and turns.

As far as gameplay goes, the standard races are available as expected, but this time, we're also treated to a story mode with objectives to be met throughout each race, which utilises some really entertaining cutscenes between races to explain the various characters' motivations for competing in such a dangerous high-speed competition. Death Race, time trials, and practice modes are also included, plus there are unlockable tracks, cars, and characters and a new edit mode that allows players to create their own vehicles using parts bought with tickets earned through winning races. Expert players who are able to complete the final cup on the hardest difficulty (not us, then) are even treated to a special unlockable 'AX Cup', which brings all of the tracks from 2003's arcade edition to the home console edition.

After a 51-episode anime series in 2003 and another Japanese exclusive GBA release in 2004, the *F-Zero* series went on hiatus and seems to be languishing on a hard drive somewhere just begging to be brought back to life. Lead character Captain Falcon has made appearances in each edition of *Super Smash Bros* right up to the most recent release in 2014, and some *F-Zero*-inspired downloadable content was released for *Mario Kart 8* in 2015. The fact that the franchise has been utilised so recently does give a bit of hope that maybe one day we'll see a full *F-Zero* title on a current-gen console. Please give it to us, Nintendo. Please!



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Tabletop gaming and the 1984 family-friendly comedy/horror movie *Ghostbusters* have always been slightly strange bedfellows. Horror is something relatively easy to do on the gaming table; thwarting expectations and generating suspense are things that storytellers have been doing since tales began, but comedy is hard. It's an entirely different sort of skill set, and one that doesn't lend itself easily to a casual gaming night. Add to this the fact that most games masters (your humble correspondent included) are pretty lazy when it comes to setting up games and you'd expect a *Ghostbusters* RPG to be more horror than comedy. Luckily, this isn't the case.

1986's *Ghostbusters* RPG is widely

regarded as a classic and frequently haunts the top end of the 'all time greats' list, and won the H. G. Wells Award back in the day. Games publishers West End Games also expected the horror aspect to overwhelm the comedy side, and drafted in Sandy Petersen, Lynn Willis, and Greg Stafford to do the honours. Sandy, of course, is better known for his work on *Call of Cthulhu*, the greatest horror RPG of all time. Greg would go on to create cult game *Unknown Armies*, which can be best described as *True Detective* meets *The Lost Room*.

With the scary bits in capable hands, the challenge was to create something funny. West End Games had faced up to that challenge before; their game *Paranoia* was a science fiction situation comedy. However,

that game had its setting specifically tailored to suit the gaming table. *Paranoia* is set in a Kafkaesque post-apocalyptic dystopia where everything is a Catch-22 situation. Its absurdist nature means that many of the punchlines involve character death, so the game allows players to have multiple 'clones' of the same character. *Ghostbusters*, being a tie-in to a movie, didn't have this luxury.

The lessons learned from *Paranoia* could be transferred, however. Although, it suffered from a very inflexible ruleset that most players ignored; instead, it was the setting and circumstances that encouraged a sort of freeform improvisation. The funny bits came from player-on-player interaction and impossible odds. The challenge was to create something that gave the players the freedom to riff on the absurd situations the games master would throw at them, whilst still making the game enough of a challenge to be fun. Too hard and you'd not get any funny moments, too easy and the game would be boring.

The first thing the designers tweaked was the setting. Making the players characters from the actual movie probably wasn't going to work. Previous RPGs, such as adaptations of *Star Trek* and *James Bond*, tended to flop because your average gamer would rather riff on the idea of Kirk or Bond, rather than actually being them. Arguably, being a direct version of a pop culture icon is too much like hard work. In the *Ghostbusters* RPG, Peter Venkman (along with his accountant, Louis Tully) has realised that they can franchise off the Ghostbusters name to make pots of cash. Enter the players. The parent corporation supplies all the (not terribly reliable) equipment, providing Venkman and chums get a cut. Occasionally, the movie heroes will ask the player characters to do them a favour, but mostly, the PCs will find no end of monsters and ghosts to bust. Tully also tends to flood the party with paperwork; if things lull during gameplay, the general advice was to have some official or other come along and make their lives difficult through the power of bureaucracy. In short, the setting was twisted to provide plot and absurdity to the players. Oh, and because this is GHOST Busters, each character needs to have a Last Will and Testament. This tended to be a marvellous way for PCs to screw with other PCs from beyond the grave without having to be a ghost.

Rules-wise, the game was slimmed down as far as the designers dared. '80s game design still suffered from the trappings of old-school wargaming, so books tended to be filled with modifiers for terrain, movement

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45 44 43 42 41 40 39 38 37 36 35 34 33 32 31 30 29 28 27 26
25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4
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rates and other tedious nonsense.

The game specifically told the games master to chuck those things out and concentrate on an easier, more flowing game. Traits were simplified: Brains, Muscles, Moves, and Cool - this was an age when RPG characters tended to have at least eight traits. They were rated from one to five, with more being better. To do a thing (like shoot a ghost using your proton pack), you roll as many six-sided dice as you have in that trait and hit a target number. If you had a relevant 'talent', you added dice from that as well. One of these was always a 'Ghost Dice', that is, a die with a ghost on it instead of a six. The ghost is a bad thing - every time it's rolled, something bad (or funny, or both) will happen to the PCs, even if the games master rolls it. Of course, a dice pool isn't anything new now, but back then this mechanic was seen as amazing in its simplicity. The same ideas would go on to inspire The Storytelling System, the engine behind those endless Gothic horror games that plagued the '90s.

Getting injured in combat only slowed you down. Taking risks in the game was

usually worth it, but being very stupid knocked you out. For example, lashing a proton pack to a shopping trolley to make a 'ghost ram' was cool and stood a chance of success (though your character may get bruised). Taking on a bar full of thugs with only a spoon? Knocked out for a chunk of the game. The different editions of the game handled this slightly differently, but the results were the same. The grease for this was Brownie Points. Make a funny? Get a Brownie Point. Be smart and clever? Get a Brownie Point. 30 Brownie Points could be used to get an extra trait, and you could trade in a trait for 20 Brownie Points. Their main use was for doing cool stuff in game; one equalled one extra dice to roll. Want to cross the streams and survive? Better getting spending those Brownie Points! This mechanic would be copied, as well; mostly for 'cinematic' games such as *Evil Dead: Army of Darkness*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and D&D magic-punk setting *Eberron*.

The game had two editions - one for each movie - and is long out of print. Luckily, a thriving fanbase means it's still easy to find on the web, and it's still pretty cheap on eBay as there were a lot of copies made back in the day. Those looking for a similar (but more modern) take may want to check out *InSpectres*; the same sort of thing, but with newer mechanics and a simpler (non-



UK GAMES EXPO Gets Bigger

We keep saying in these pages that board gaming is the new big thing, and you'd better believe it; gaming is so popular that this year's **UK Games Expo** has expanded. Now in its tenth year, the UK's premier gaming event has spread out to Birmingham's NEC Metropole, as well as keeping its usual home of the Hilton Hotel. The massive arena space will house traders, tournaments, and cosplay areas. In addition to a vast board game library, the 3500sqm space will host table-top roleplaying sessions, so gamers can play well into the evening. There will also be Live Action Roleplay events, as well as cosplay and re-enactment groups such as the Galactic Knights, Cosplay 21, Time War, Thanet Cosplay, and the Vikings.

It's the foremost event for both serious hobby gamers and those who just want to have fun, with specific space dedicated to family gaming. Fans will have the chance to try out new products, enter tournaments and challenge others in their favourite games over the three days. Guests include gaming celebs such as Tom Vasel and Sam Healey.

The **UK Games Expo 2016** takes place from June 3rd to June 5th, and tickets are on sale now from ukgamesexpo.co.uk.

franchised) setting.

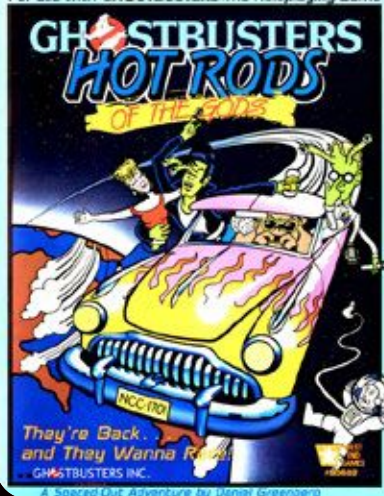
Of course, this chunk of old-school nostalgia throws Cryptozoic's recent *Ghostbusters: The Board Game* into sharp relief. 30 years or so have passed, and rather than a new RPG, we got a totally different sort of thing.

Ghostbusters: The Board Game took \$1.5 million via Kickstarter, and that meant it's a huge box filled with nicely sculpted pieces. The artists behind it are Erik Burnham and Dan Schoening, who are better known for their work on IDW's *Ghostbusters* comics. The result is both unique and instantly recognisable, with everything from ECTO-1 to the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man being in the box. The game itself is a faster version of *Zombicide* - a sort of video game-like team affair, in which you take on hordes of horrors. It's a little samey, but there's some genuine humour throughout. It lacks the spark of the RPG, but I'm sort of hopeful that the forthcoming new movie will ignite that spirit of fun in future expansions.

Until next time, keep 'busting!'

Ed Fortune can be tweeted at @ed_fortune and contacted via ed.fortune@starburstmagazine.com

For use with GHOSTBUSTERS The Roleplaying Game



WATTO'S EMPORIUM

STUFF WE LIKED FROM
AROUND THE WEB
THIS MONTH WITH
JACK BOTTOMLEY

CHOOSE A SIDE... AND A HOODIE

As this issue has already lightly hinted at, a little film called **Captain America: Civil War** is upon us (see page 12). Marvel Studios' blockbuster machine really needs to pull out all the stops to keep things from getting stale and judging by all we have seen thus far, **Civil War** looks like it will fit the bill very nicely. Friendships will crumble, patriots will fight and no doubt the Marvel Cinematic Universe will be given another shake-up, as Captain America and Iron Man are at loggerheads. So, this all poses a question, whose side are you on?

So, assemble team Stark, gather team Cap and head over to **Merchoid.com** and get kitted out for war, or perhaps more realistically, online back and forth debating. The site features a range of gear, available for pre-order, based on this third **Captain America** film (well technically, it is more but who's counting anymore, The Avengers appear in each other's movies all the bloody time, the screen-hogging sods). Our favourites are these two hoodies - one representing the metal millionaire, the other embodying the nationalistic nobleman - both equally faithful to the characters. It may be even harder choosing which one to own than it is to pick who you are rooting for on screen. Though if you can't decide, you could always act as a referee-like figure with the nifty snapback cap, which has a split-down-the-middle design, representing both arguing avengers!

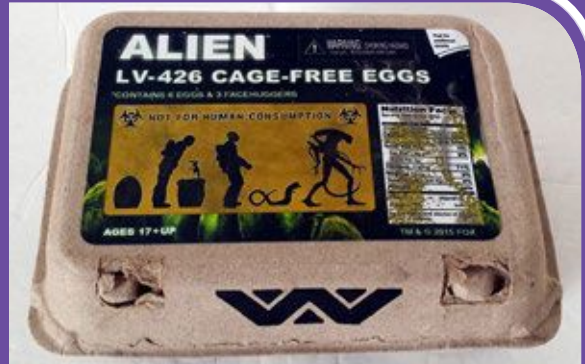
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NOT EGGSACTLY EDIBLE...

A less fluffy item, this way comes, though, as hitting movie headlines this month at STARBURST HQ was casting news on Ridley Scott's sequel to **Prometheus**, which is to be titled **Alien: Covenant**. The film looks to be leading up to the events of Scott's original **Alien** film, and we found something that was a pretty neatly presented bit of merchandise, indebted to that very film and its sequels. One of the many iconic images that the **Alien** franchise birthed (so to speak), was the slimy Xenomorph eggs, and the finery fadges 'the facehuggers' that they contained. So, over at zavvi.com, you can get yourself a bit of deranged dairy in this NECA Xenomorph egg set, thoughtfully presented in a supermarket egg box. Well, that's us put out our egg sandwich...

NECA XENOMORPH EGG SET - £22.99
AVAILABLE FROM ZAVVI.COM



DON'T CROSS THE STREAMS!

In the time between issues, we had our first glimpse of who we were 'gonna call', and many folks' response was, 'wrong number'. Yes, director Paul Feig showed some cajones, when he announced his plans of expanding the **Ghostbusters** series with a brand new cast and characters. Sadly, with the release of the official trailer at the beginning of the month, fan reaction was about as positive as being slimed - while suffering from gastroenteritis. Many were dropping the line, 'I told you so', while others were, well, not pleased. The trailer looks directionless, pointless, and like a waste of a talented cast; but it's early days (the film is released in July), so let's hope for a pleasant surprise. In the meantime, you can celebrate the '84 comedy landmark, over at beltsbucklestees.com, with this great **Ghostbusters** logo belt buckle, a design that looks as good now as it did 30+ years ago!

GHOSTBUSTERS BELT BUCKLE - £15
AVAILABLE FROM BELTSBUCKLESTEEES.COM

THESE TOYS ARE A BARE NECESSITY

Director Jon Favreau's remake of Disney's animated musical classic **The Jungle Book** (see page 46) - released on April 15th - looks as much Kipling as Disney, which could yield great results. So, ahead of once again tapping your toes with Baloo (played by **Ghostbuster** Bill Murray) and the crew, why not get a little closer to the newer incarnation of the characters, with this delightful range of toys from disneystore.co.uk. Included in the range is an exceedingly hairy King Louie, a rather scary Shere Khan, a nicely designed Kaa, a cute Gray, a smooth looking Klint the Elephant, and our personal favorite, an absolutely adorable Baloo! Damn Disney toys and their irresistible fluffiness!

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STARBURST: EVENT PROFILE



WORDS: ANDREW KEATES

PHOTOS: ANDREW KEATES & JAMES PERRY

THE SCI-FI BALL 22: Grand Harbour Hotel, Southampton February 5th – 7th, 2016 in aid of the Teenage Cancer Trust

The UK's longest running not-for-profit science fiction convention, the Sci-Fi Ball celebrated its 22nd year at the Grand Harbour Hotel, Southampton this February. A small away team from STARBURST HQ went along, and boy did we have fun!

We arrived a day before the con officially started and were amazed to find that the beautiful four star Grand Harbour Hotel already had cosplayers propping up the bar in eager anticipation for the three-day weekend to begin, along with sci-fi themed snacks and special convention pass holder drinks promotions. Even the concierge, reception, and bar staff were in fancy dress - which made for a very colourful check-in indeed! We spent a lot of this time talking to attendees who had been coming to the Ball since it began in 1995 at Bournemouth. What was clear is this wasn't a big, commercial, signing event, but rather an opportunity for anyone, regardless of background or differences to come together in the true Roddenberry/*Trek* ethos of Vulcan IDIC (infinite diversity in infinite combinations) and meet like-minded souls, who over the course of a weekend could become friends for life.

The event included talks and mingling with several familiar faces from the world of science fiction, including Vaughn Armstrong (Admiral Maxwell Forrester in *Star Trek: Enterprise*), Annette Badland (*Doctor Who*, *Wizards vs. Aliens*, *EastEnders*), Sabrina Bartlett (Maid Marian in *Doctor Who*, Sophia in *Da Vinci's Demons*, *Game of Thrones*), Casey Biggs (Damar the Cardassian in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*), Dominic Keating (Lt. Malcolm Reed in *Star Trek: Enterprise*, *Heroes*, *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*), Connor Trinneer (Charles 'Trip' Tucker III in *Star Trek: Enterprise*, *Stargate: Atlantis*), and James Moran (TV writer whose credits include *Doctor Who* and *Cockneys versus Zombies*) plus author Robert Rankin and illustrator Lee Bradley.

All of the talks and panels were hugely entertaining and it was a stroke of genius from SFB Events to put Trinneer and Keating together as a sort of *Star Trek* tag team. Attendees could get very reasonably priced autographs or have professional photograph sessions with the stars, activities, challenges, and art/fiction competitions. As well as the usual emporium of cult collectables and merchandise, there was a special table-top gaming room, an exhibition hall including some rather camp, roaming full-size Daleks, life-size recreations of the *Star Trek* Enterprise D Bridge and transporter platform, a *Trek* costume and prop exhibition, and special events from The Victorian Steampunk Society, including the opportunity to take part in tea-duelling!

Friday's highlight included a 'Con



Dance Workshop', where the organisers taught various line dance style routines for the parties in the evening, an epic pub quiz full of geeky questions, plus state of the art interactive gameshows, including *Who Wants To Be A Starship Captain?*, *Geeking for Gold*, and a *Whose Who?* game. Proceedings really felt like they had kicked off with the Opening Ceremony, which included special messages from Stephen Fry, Taron Egerton, and Mark Gatiss, all wishing everyone well for the weekend. But, what was less expected, was that two of the attendees had organised to propose to one another on stage! We all held our breath before the lucky lady in her *Star Trek* uniform said yes! For those who purchased Gold Tickets, there was then a chance to mingle with the stars over a chocolate fountain and glass of champagne in a very posh reception, before joining everyone later that evening with a party themed around Children's Books and some very impressive cosplayers.





As Saturday morning arrived, we couldn't wait to get back to the Grand Harbour Hotel for the activities. Jam packed like the previous day, Saturday included the highlight event of the weekend - a full, three-course black-tie/fancy dress dinner with live cabaret provided by the Enterprise Blues Band (Vaughn Armstrong and Casey Biggs) and a late night disco with cosplay competitions, games and you've guess it, more dancing!

By Sunday, we were fit to drop from having just too much fun, but what was apparent is that nobody wanted to go home. We had been given a truly authentic, old-school convention experience and credit must go to the organisers at SFB Events who really know how to make anyone welcome. The day finished with a closing ceremony, where director of SFB Events, Anne Lindup, announced that everyone had raised £4,682.95 for the Teenage Cancer Trust. All that was left to do was another, incredible interactive big screen game of *Universally Challenged*, karaoke and with what little energy we had left, just a little bit more dancing.

We have already heard that the Grand Harbour Hotel is nearly filled to capacity from those booking for SFB 23. So, if you really do want to have one of the best weekends you can have with stars and fans of science fiction, put together by a truly great family of organisers and a packed, socially orientated itinerary of events, book your Gold tickets for the SF Ball 23. You won't be disappointed and, in turn, will be raising much needed funds for the extraordinary work of the Teenage Cancer Trust. It's a big statement, but we think the Sci-Fi Ball might just be the best convention that the UK has to offer. May they live long and prosper.

For more information on future conventions, head over to sfbevents.com.



In a prelude to our much anticipated SAUCER SECTION - coming soon to STARBURST - we chat with CONNOR TRINNEER and DOMINIC KEATING from STAR TREK ENTERPRISE about their time on the show...

STARBURST: What were your thoughts after *Star Trek: Enterprise* was cancelled?

Connor Trinneer: Initially, I thought I was going to get another show!

Dominic Keating: Yeah, we both did work. I went on to do *Heroes* a bit

CT: I did *Stargate: Atlantis* for a good stretch, too

DK: I remember the phone call. Rick Berman called me on my phone and said, 'Are you sitting down?' I guess this was a different animal, though. Rick and Brannon were winding down 16/17 years of running that franchise.

CT: But it was sad; maybe not everyone thought so in the cast, but I thought I had a great part.

DK: And we had legs in us. That was the frustrating thing. It wasn't so much our show was going down, but our network was going down. UPN was in dire trouble and behind the scenes, which we didn't really know or understand, there were big talks and eventually they dissolved. So they decided rather than vying against one another for the same audience, they would team up with another network and get a new audience and that didn't include using a *Star Trek* show.

Do you think audiences had enough of *Star Trek*?

DK: Oh yeah, definitely! They had gone to the well. But then, ten years later, they've got two movies that re-energised the whole thing and they're doing another TV show, so the jewel is still in the crown, and it's glistening! It needed a rest and it needed a bigger profile than our network, UPN, could give it. It needed a J. J. Abrams reinvention to get a new crowd to fall in love with the series again.

CT: It was going to putter along and get the same ratings that we got, and what *Voyager* and *Deep Space Nine* got, but that no longer was the interest, because of the Network collapsing.

DK: And it was an expensive show to make. Scott probably would never have gone to Vancouver. He had two small kids, so we were kind of scuppered. Which was a shame, because by the time Manny Coto came along as a staff writer and ended up running the show come the last season, we had legs.

The amount of people who come up to me at conventions all these years later because they've watched the show on Netflix or whatever and say, 'you know what, you're the best one!'

CT: That's the thing. In retrospect, they're looking back at us and giving it a fair shake.

DK: We got the same numbers as the other series, but it was silly things that not everyone could watch the show depending on their region thanks to UPN, we would always get bumped for a football game or wrestling. But I've always said to Connor, God bless all those years we had at Paramount, though! I mean, that studio, the history, and walking through *The Godfather* alley every day. I mean, Alfred Hitchcock worked on that stage.

CT: And on Stage 19, there's actually a swimming pool underneath where Esther Williams shot all of her movies.

DK: Just to walk into Stage 9 on a Monday morning, which was affectionately known as 'Planet Hell', and over that weekend they had installed a waterfall, or a comet, or a jungle scene and you got to play in that this week.

Particularly in Season Two, it seemed the producers would take any opportunity to have Charles 'Trip' Tucker III strip down into his underwear and save the ship, did you ever feel uncomfortable with so much unnecessary nudity?

CT: Any opportunity! I had the body and I really felt that I got so many stories that I might have just been giving back a little bit! I never once thought that I was being objectified. I also don't think I would have cared either.

DK: And don't forget all of Kirk's chiffon-clad ladies. Ah, Kirk's chiffon-clad ladies - my first foray in erotica! And at that time in America, and it still goes on a little bit now, if you were on a TV show, at some point there was going to be a photoshoot of you in a bikini, whether you were a girl or guy. It was all about, 'and I'm ripped too'. It was the norm at that time in the early 2000s.

ANDREW KEATES

STAR TREK fans can catch episodes from their favourite series weekly on CBS ACTION Sky 148 Virgin 192 Freeview 64 Freesat 137

PAUL MOUNT'S



Flashlights at the ready! This month, we welcome back Mulder and Scully as THE X-FILES briefly reopen for business, witness the rebirth of HEROES and say 'thanks for the memories' to BBC Three as it shifts online...

We love science fiction. And horror. And fantasy. And all points in between. That's why we're here, you and I. But when you think about it, there are really only a handful of genre shows that have made that perilous leap between the cult crowd and mass audience approval in the sixty or seventy years that TV has been a major player in our collective lives. Fans of *Farscape*, *Firefly*, *Sliders*, *Babylon 5* and a gazillion other high concept shows might find it a difficult pill to swallow, but mention of their own personal faves, however, good they may be, is likely to raise little more than a puzzled expression and a few fearful backward steps from Mr and Mrs Man-in-the-Street. They really don't know about this stuff because it flies way below their mainstream TV radar, the world of soap operas, detective series, medical dramas, quizzes, talent, and reality shows. Spaceships, time travel, wormholes, monsters, parallel universes and (the more obscure) superheroes mean little or nothing to around 90% of the TV-watching populace of the world (I have no statistical data to back this up, I'm just throwing a random figure out there to get a reaction – usually works).

So the ones that have made a real cross-cultural impact on our lives – the ones even the legendary man on the Clapham Omnibus could engage in conversation about – are probably *Quatermass*, *Doctor Who*, *Star Trek*, and *The X-Files*. Everything else is just a box set gathering dust on a geek's shelf. Twenty-odd years on from its 1993 debut, it's easy to forget just how *huge* *The X-Files* was in its first few years. It was a genuine TV phenomenon, proper water cooler TV; it was the sci-fi show that appealed to people who didn't like sci-fi shows, possibly because many of them didn't actually realise it was

sci-fi. In David Duchovny's Fox 'Spooky' Mulder and Gillian Anderson's Dana Scully, *The X-Files* created two massively iconic television characters who not only shaped an enduring crossover TV classic, with investigations and adventures, but became unexpected and unlikely conduits for the hopes and fears of an entire generation.

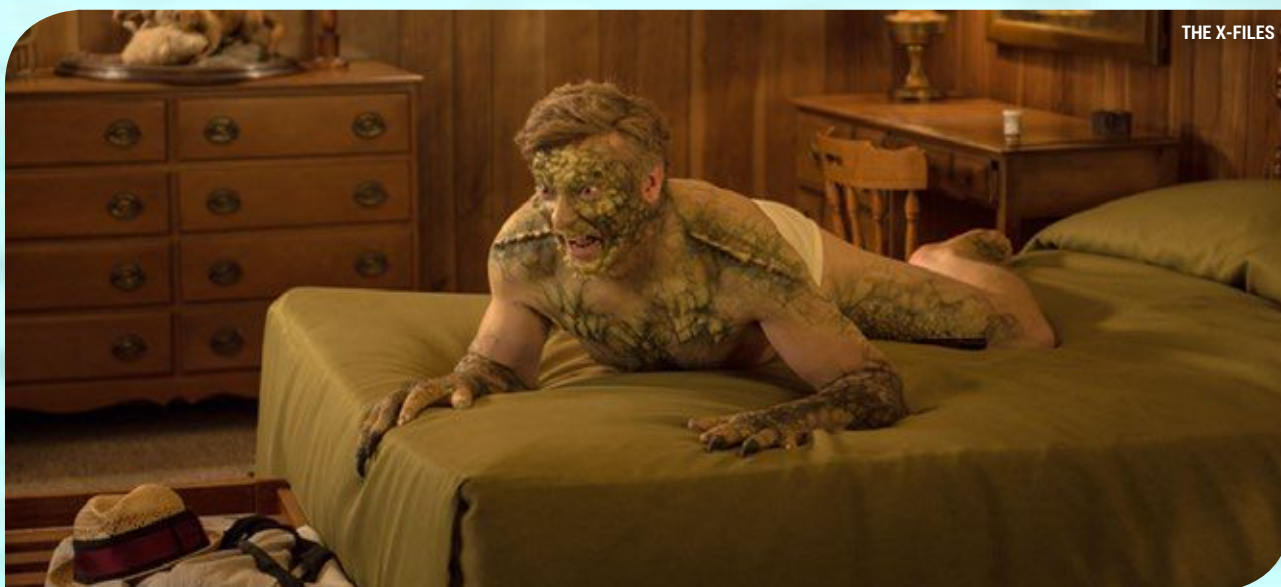
The X-Files was born at the tail end of the twentieth century, during an atmosphere of pre-millennial jitters in a social environment characterised by largely fanciful conspiracy theories and a genuine, palpable fear about what sort of world we were creating as we lumbered towards a new century. The show asked questions TV hadn't been asking for years even if, frustratingly, it never really got around to answering any of them. Was the truth out there? As *The X-Files* rolled

on (possibly outstaying its welcome and almost certainly diluting its impact), its internal continuity became so twisted and convoluted that it became quite apparent that no one steering the ship – especially surfer dude showrunner Chris Carter – really had any idea what the hell was going on or what the point of the show was anymore.

News of the return of the series for a six-episode limited run – a tenth season, to all intents and purposes – was greeted with massive excitement from resilient fans who'd kept the flame alive and their fingers crossed, even when the ill-judged second feature film spin-off, 2008's *I Want To Believe*, failed to live up to expectations despite turning a decent worldwide Box Office profit. But times have changed and so has the world. Would Mulder and Scully's very particular brand of brooding pseudo-supernatural drama sit comfortably amidst the colourful superhero antics and in-your-face horror of the best of the 21st century's genre TV?

It'd be nice to be able to report that this brief new series was all killer and no filler – but that clearly wasn't quite the case. With only six episodes to play with, the show couldn't really hang about and across its run, it managed to touch all the narrative bases that worked in the original series. Arc-heavy episodes (the series made few concessions to newcomers, many plot points and character beats playing off barely remembered bits of obscure continuity) sat alongside 'monster of the week' (the grisly limb-rendering Band-Aid Nose Man – more terrifying than his name might suggest) and an episode reflecting contemporary issues (suicide bombers). The standout instalment was the brilliantly funny and subversive *Mulder and Scully Meet the Were-Monster*, written and directed by Darin Morgan, who provided the most memorable off-beat episodes from the original series. It fell to Carter to kick the series off and season opener *My Struggle* was the wobblest episode of the run.





Following a clumsy and tortuous 'this is what this show is all about' voiceover from Duchovny - his alarmingly monotone tone suggesting an actor who really wishes he hadn't signed on for this one after all - the episode struggled to find its feet even as Mulder and Scully were reunited at the behest of their old FBI boss Walter Skinner (Mitch Pileggi) to meet up with histrionic webcaster Tad O'Malley, who leads them to a young woman who claims she was abducted by extra-terrestrials and seeded with alien DNA.

This was worryingly familiar **X-Files** stuff hampered by a clunky script from Carter (whose last effort, remember, was the appalling Amazon pilot **The After** a couple of years ago) and somewhat off-kilter performances from Duchovny and Anderson. One extraordinarily badly written confrontation between the two suggested that the wheels were going to come off the whole series. Scully faces off against an increasingly confused and paranoid Mulder, grabbing his shoulders and shouting "*But you wanted to believe! You wanted to believe so much!*" to which Mulder, inevitably, could only reply. "*I did want to believe! The truth is out there!*" I was half-expecting the pair to complete their painfully clumsy references to the show's titles (and mission statement) by screaming "*Created by Chris Carter! Music by Mark Snow!*" at one another.

Fortunately, the series began to find its feet in the second episode with Mulder and Scully - back working at the hastily reopened X-Files - investigating genetically manipulated teenagers; then Morgan's hysterical monster episode helped the show loosen its corsets for the rest of its run, with Duchovny particularly clearly enjoying portraying an older, more carefree, cynical Mulder who's given to making wry quips and witty asides. Even Carter raised his game in the exciting, apocalyptic finale which looked, briefly, as if it was set to finally finish **The X-Files** (and humanity) once and for all; instead 'My Struggle II' (which saw a full return

for the show's legendary Cigarette Smoking Man - merely heavily scarred and mutilated, despite having been hit head-on by a missile strike at the end of Season Nine... that's creative licence for you, I suppose) ended on one killer cliffhanger, which virtually guarantees further episodes because, like, *they really can't leave it like that...*

So it works. **The X-Files** 2016 works - and far better than I feared it would. The show has adapted to the demands of a modern TV audience (especially those who were there the first time around) whilst retaining the charm and appeal of the original. It's acknowledged the passing of time and the ageing of its lead characters (with Episode Five cheekily introducing two new agents in Robbie Amell's Agent Miller and the brilliant Lauren Ambrose's Agent Einstein, younger mirror images of Mulder and Scully - the next generation of X-Files investigators should Duchovny and Anderson decide to pass on coming back for more?) while finally advancing and resolving many

of the arcs and plot points left dangling when the show finally finished back in 2002. Encapsulating everything which was good about the show with a scoop or two of everything which was lazy and infuriating, it's been great fun to welcome back **The X-Files** - it's always good to see old friends when they're on form as good as this - and whilst I'm not advocating a return to the long 22-week seasons of old (Duchovny and Anderson certainly wouldn't be up for it) I'd happily welcome the guys back for new eight or ten episode runs for the next couple of years. Impressive ratings in both the US and the UK seem to suggest that **The X-Files** may be destined to stay open for a little while longer yet...

HEROES REBORN

By an extraordinary and eerie coincidence (cue **The Twilight Zone** music) another old sci-fi hit has been resurrected for a short-run series and found its way onto 5STAR in the UK. Actually, it's not that



much of a coincidence, it's a scheduling thing; **Heroes Reborn** started airing in September in the US and just happened to turn up on UK screens shortly after **The X-Files** popped up on 5. When the original **Heroes** – the story of ordinary folk with extraordinary powers – arrived in 2006, it was, for a short while, a bit of a sensation and drifted close to becoming another crossover hit. I never quite got into the show. I ditched it after about Episode Twelve because it just wasn't floating my sci-fi boat, and I wasn't hugely surprised when the show sprung a leak in its disastrous second season. **Heroes** limped on for two more years but was finally axed in 2010. Now it's been dragged out of mothballs and whilst it's significantly less dull and meandering than its first incarnation, it's surely too soon to bring it back with its miserable final few years still relatively fresh in the audience's memory?

But **Heroes Reborn** is watchable enough. A year after a terrorist attack in Odessa, 'evos' (evolved humans) are held to blame and forced into hiding when they come under attack by vicious vigilantes. Noah Bennet (Jack Coleman) is the first of the original series' cast to



crop up in **Heroes Reborn**, devastated by the death of his daughter Claire during the bombing ("Save the Cheerleader, save the....oh."), but early episodes make a decent fist of introducing some new characters coming to terms with their powers and trying to keep them secret in a world that has turned against them. Other familiar characters crop up as the series progresses, teaming up with the latest generation of 'evos' to protect the world against a disaster that could leave the planet vulnerable to solar radiation. Engaging enough stuff and mercifully free of the self-important pomposity of the series first time around, but it all seems a bit old hat now, determinedly early 21st century. TV's full of super-powered characters now and most of them wear silly costumes and have proper comic book adventures. Shows like **Alphas** and the UK's **Misfits** (and probably others I've forgotten because they were so forgettable) have pretty much mined the 'ordinary people with extraordinary abilities' mine dry as a bone. So whilst there's really nothing much wrong with **Heroes Reborn**, it's really not doing anything we've not seen before, and we've seen most of it in **Heroes** itself. It's a bit of a 'so what?' shoulder-shrug of a show. Summarily cancelled already in the States, **Heroes Reborn** has ended up as **Heroes Stillborn**.

BBC THREE

Cheerio, then, to BBC Three, which finally shut up shop in February as part of the Corporation's ongoing cost-cutting measures (the closure will apparently save around £60 million). In fact, the station's moved online, which seems appropriate considering that its intended target audiences – the channel has often been dubbed the BBC's 'yoof' channel – seem to spend half their lives glued to their mobile phones, immersing themselves in the deep, dark world of social media. I bid the real BBC Three a fond farewell, though, not because I was a huge fan of much of its cheap, exploitative output, but because, possibly inadvertently, it often

seemed to be a champion of *our* kind of telly. Let's not forget that **Doctor Who** spin-off **Torchwood** was born on BBC Three, before swiftly moving across to BBC Two and then BBC One and, although not hugely-watched, both **The Fades** and **In the Flesh** were BAFTA-winning cult hits. Even the recent **Tatatu**, while not especially acclaimed or accomplished, was a bold stab at doing something the other BBC channels probably wouldn't consider. BBC Three may have disappeared into the netherworld of the web, but, happily, its tradition of pioneering new genre telly continues with the arrival, later this year, of Patrick Ness's **Class**, another **Doctor Who** spin-off chronicling the adventures of kids from Coal Hill School, ex-companion Clara's occasional workplace. Hopefully, it'll be better than it sounds.

AND FINALLY...

I don't usually get dragged into the contents of our lively letters page in the wake of one of my occasional diatribes about the current state of dear old **Doctor Who**, correspondence which tends to vary from 'Mount is right, **Doctor Who** is shite' to 'Mount is wrong, **Doctor Who** is genius, Moffat is God.' Last month, though, reader M.R. John (hi, M.R.!) commented that my 'current lengthy tirades make the moany letters he used to write to **Doctor Who** Magazine thirty years ago look like works of Wildean genius.' Nope, M.R., not guilty. To the best of my ageing, but still surprisingly razor-sharp memory, I wrote just the one letter to **Doctor Who**'s official organ (and I'm not referring to Steven Moffat here), which complimented the magazine on maintaining a decent standard when the show was struggling in the mid-to-late 1980s. I suspect, M.R. (I may call you M.R., mayn't I?) that you're confusing me with some other disgruntled veteran former **Doctor Who** fan; after all, there's a lot of us about...

Contact me via the magic of email at paul.mount@starburstmagazine.com or do the Twitter thing @PMount

ALSO SCREENING



11/22/63

Based on the Stephen King novel, this US drama, streamed on the Hulu service, stars James Franco as a time traveller who sets out to prevent the assassination of JFK.
From April 10th on Fox.

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The second season of the saucy, lavish historical time travel romp starring Catriona Balfe and Sam Heughan.
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it's only a movie

a column by JORDAN ROYCE

The early part of 2016 may not be quite the crowd-pleaser that the same period in 2015 proved to be, but so far it is still managing to produce the goods in a genre sense. **Deadpool** was virtually unknown this time last year outside of the fanboy crowd, yet this improbable mainstream hit has proved to be a minor game-changer.

I don't use the term improbable lightly. Like the dreadful Trank reboot of **Fantastic Four**, it went through development hell, yet this was not a stillborn disaster, unlike the aforementioned Trankastrophe. **Deadpool**, the Merc with the Mouth, had seemed an easy win for inclusion in **X-Men Origins: Wolverine**, yet the mishandling of that movie pretty much sunk the chances of ever seeing him again on the screen, and very nearly sunk the X-Men franchise itself. To be fair, **X-Men Origins: Wolverine** punched well above its weight in terms of decimating the expectations of the fanbase, simultaneously delivering an almost unrecognisable Gambit, whilst managing to sew up the mouth of the merc, and bolt on some optic blasts, and retractable arm blades.

Fox clearly viewed Wolverine as the bankable property and merely wanted to shoehorn in some extra characters. Even now, this movie causes them problems as it is the main contradiction that exposes the retconning of **X-Men: First Class** into a prequel instead of a reboot, with its twelve-year-old version of Emma Frost in the '80s that pretty much couldn't have been played by January Drones in a movie set during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Ryan Reynolds did not really want to play this bastardised version of Deadpool but did not want to see the role played by someone else. Luckily for us, he never did give up on revisiting the character...

Indeed, it took some pretty naughty shenanigans to make **Deadpool** happen. Having secured the now-legendary test footage budget from Fox, and even going as far as containing a personal plea from Deadpool himself to the then head of **Fox Film Entertainment**, Tom Rothman, it still did not get the green light for another four years. It took an illegal leaking of the footage, which remained the property of Fox, to trigger the green light due to overwhelming pressure from



Those cheeky Foxxers have just bagged \$651M

the Comic Con circuit. Who leaked it? Well, unbelievably, Ryan Reynolds has actually gone on record and admitted that it was one of four people. In the frame are Ryan Reynolds himself, director Tim Miller, and writers Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick. Reynolds has even gone on record as stated that he is, "70% sure that he didn't do it". What a cheeky monkey, eh? In any event, it worked, and as they say, it is pretty tough to court martial success. As of going to print, **Deadpool** has taken globally over \$621M on a budget of only \$58M, making **Deadpool** one of the most proportionally successful movies of all time - bagging a whopping 1100% return on the studio investment.

I must confess to having underestimated the movie itself. I enjoyed the trailers and was looking forward to having a bit of a laugh - nothing more. What a pleasant surprise to find that **Deadpool** is that rarest of creatures: a black comedy that doesn't make the mistake of descending into nihilism. In fact, it hands you its mission statement at the credits with a generic line-up of archetypes gag, which sets up what is literally about to explode on screen. It is almost a contract between the film and the viewer. A promise to deliver on a bunch of clichés in an entertaining manner over the course of the following 108 minutes.

The story is wafer thin in its simplicity. Wade Wilson is a merc for hire who falls for badass Vanessa, gets sick, receives a dodgy cure that mutates him - now he simply wants a cure and to protect the woman he still longs for. It's this simplicity and straightforward pacing

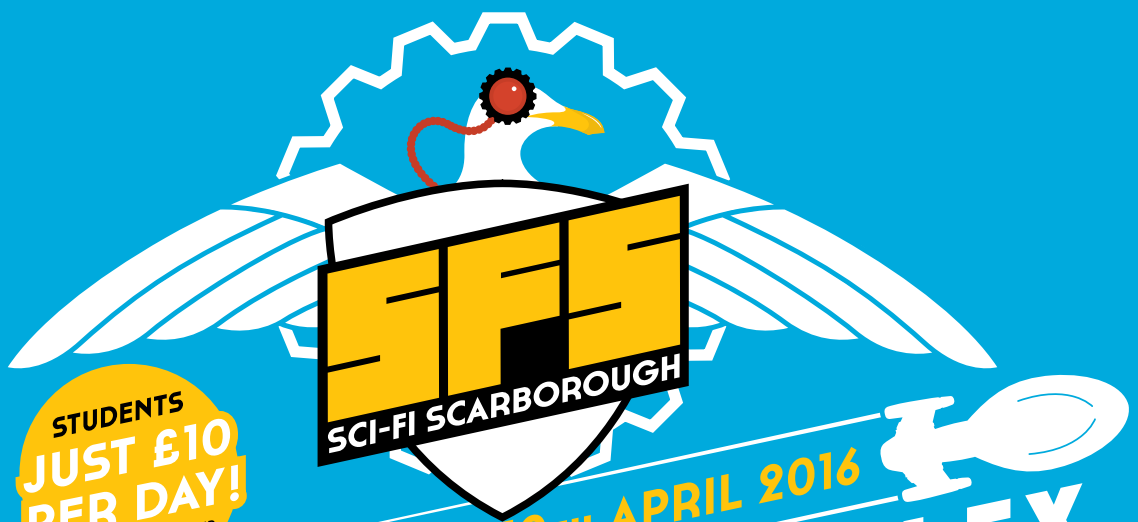
that makes **Deadpool** as a movie such a potent fix of dumb fun. Everything just works. Even the character of Deadpool ought to be a problem, with his smart mouth, the surrealist level of combat artistry, and a healing factor that should render all of the tension moot - yet you give it all a pass. That is the real trick going on here. **Deadpool** is an epically shallow movie, a little too smug, but the sheer entertainment from just watching Reynolds as Deadpool doing his *sh*tick* is more than enough to carry the film along at a fair old clip. Reynolds is certainly in career rehab at this point, and he was wise to persist at bagging a second chance at a character who fits him like a glove.

Even dodgy gags that failed so spectacularly in **Kick-Ass 2** get a pass here. It's quite an achievement to include a scene with the lead character getting violated by his girlfriend's dildo on International Women's Day.

Anyone raised on the '70s pyjama-clad adventures of Spidey never thought that there could be a saturation point of good superhero movies, yet I do feel that we were in need of at best a slight tweak or a minor reinvention of the format - then along comes **Deadpool** to kick start the next stage. The stage beyond merely presenting believability via effects. The fact that the character of Deadpool himself seems quite bored with the rote nature of superhero fare is, in itself, a clever strand of DNA that permeates proceedings. Something *this* steeped in meta-humour and over the top violence is just the tonic for me. It is no wonder that comic book fans and casual moviegoers alike are spooning this up.

Next month, I will bring you up to speed on the **STARBURST International Film Festival** taking place on Friday 26th - Sunday 28th August 2016. It's going to be an epic event, and all of us need to get on board with it...

Jordan Royce can be contacted at: jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com and hosts the STARBURST Radio Show every Wednesday, 9pm until 11pm GMT on Fab Radio International: www.fabradiointernational.com also available from iTunes as a Podcast



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